Oracy APPG

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'

Laura North

Full name:

We Speak

School or Organisation:

Founder and CEO

Role:

Written evidence:

wespeak

Submission from We Speak (www.wespeak.co), prepared by Laura North, Juwairiah Mussa and Rosie Ellis.

Summary:
- 1-3: Introduction
- 4-7: Responses to: What skills do young people need for their futures?
- 8-11: Responses to: How does speaking confidence impact on life opportunities, especially employment?
- 12-15: Responses to: Does speaking confidence impact on wellbeing or other areas in preparing young people for their futures?
- 16: Contributors

1. We Speak works with young people from under-represented backgrounds who don't feel confident speaking in front of groups. We help them find their authentic voice and adapt it to a range of situations, enabling them to take action and reach their potential in life.

2. In the spirit of our commitment to equal voice, We Speak arranged for 16 invited guests to respond to questions from the inquiry as part of a discussion. More than half of the participants were young people (5 sixth-form pupils and 4 university students/recent graduates). The other participants represented a range of perspectives including business, university access and mental health. The discussion was held on Monday 16 September at the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) in London as part of the Big Education Conversation, a national initiative focusing on how we can help prepare young people for their futures.

3. In order to ensure that each person's contribution was heard and noted, we used We Speak methods to run the discussion. For example, we chose a relaxed space designed for interaction (the Collaboration Room at the RSA) and We Speak University Student Facilitators led small group discussions before feeding back to the group. In the questions, we replaced the word 'oracy' with 'speaking confidence' to reflect We Speak's specialism in self-confidence and how people *feel* about speaking. We've condensed and edited some of the quotes for length and readability, but retained the voice of each participant.

4. **Question: What skills do young people need for their futures?**
   (Based on Question 6, Value and impact: What do children and young people at school and entering employment want to be able to access, what skills do they want to leave school with?)

5. Sixth formers:
   - Having the ability to **motivate** yourself. It's sometimes very hard to actually do things, sometimes you don't really want to.

- ■ Being able to keep yourself **mentally afloat**. You need to be able to have a support system.
- ■ Being **collaborative**, including **teamwork**. You are going to need that in most situations. You need to be able to work with other people you may or may not like.
- ■ **Empathy**. It's a key skill to build relationships, you are going to need it in everyday life in both work and your social life.
- ■ Being able to use your **initiative**.
- ■ **Resilience.** As you go on in your life you are going to have to stick to something.
- ■ I know a lot of people who are good at a lot of stuff but they lack the **confidence** to see that they are good at it. Their lack of confidence makes you feel less confident. So you are less likely to trust or rely on them.
- ■ **Problem solving**, it is important in our lives in so many ways.
- ■ **Perseverance**, being able to endure it.

6. University students/recent graduates:
   - ■ **Being able to voice your concerns**. After secondary school or college, we were told about university but not given guidance on how it would actually be. I was thrown in the deep end and I had an inability to really voice my concerns and say I was struggling.
   - ■ **Speaking**. I think it depends on what job you do. I come from a medical background and you have to speak to so many people everyday.
   - ■ We all agreed that it is important both internally and externally to have that **self belief**.
   - ■ Being willing to learn and being **open** to new ideas as well as **tolerance** of other people's values and views.

7. Employers/professionals:
   - ■ **Adaptability.** Once you get out of school or university, you're often in situations where you have an idea of what you think it's going to be like, however you are often wrong. Being able to acknowledge that and adapt to the situation.
   - ■ **Not being afraid to fail**. When you fail in the real world it isn't like failing in exams. You have lots of opportunities to try different things and that's actually how you learn it.
   - ■ **Financial literacy**. I remember when I went to university, during Freshers Week there were lots of banks giving out credit cards. However you are not financially literate to understand the implications of that.
   - ■ **Articulating yourself** through the written word. Understanding that there are different ways of communicating in different environments.
   - ■ **Taking initiative.** Feeling like you can do stuff and take action.
   - ■ **Resilience** because for young people, you really need to believe in yourself.
   - ■ Balance between **confidence** and then the **openness to learn new things** and understanding that you don't know everything.
   - ■ **Values** that you live by, having the time and space to build them when you're young is pretty important.

- **Empathy.** Being empathetic allows you to work with others, doing team work and being adaptable.
- We've noticed that all the skills that we've come up with aren't skills in the traditional or academic sense but are qualities.

8. **Question: How does speaking confidence impact on life opportunities, especially employment?**
   (Based on Question 5, Value and impact: 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?)

9. Sixth formers:
   - In my experience, I feel like most of the teachers and people around, they are more understanding if you haven't always got speaking confidence. but I believe it will change as we get older.
   - People who don't have more confidence can be perceived as rude, and you would be more desirable if you are able to talk.
   - Being able to use confidence to defend yourself. For example when I babysit if I've set aside an entire evening and expected a certain amount of money and they cancelled last minute or they come back early, I get less money and that can really affect me, and not feeling like I can say anything about it.
   - Speaking confidence matters with employment but doesn't really matter with friends or people you are with. It does matter when you are doing presentations or when first appearances matter.
   - In certain situations you may be taken advantage of. Being able to have the confidence to prevent that from happening.
   - If you don't speak out and don't have your needs met you can get quite resentful. Even within a job situation if you are unhappy it can impact every other part of your life. It can affect your mental well being.
   - I think it's important for interviews, you need to be able to talk and address your point.

10. University students/recent graduates:
    - When I left university and I was going to grand schemes and interviews, everyone seemed to be extremely polished. There were times when I felt like I did well, and I tried to be authentic and genuine. I was very honest with the fact that I did struggle with interviews. Maybe my cynical side believes that is why that I didn't get the job.
    - When you go into networking opportunities, I do believe there is a culture that you should be able to articulate yourself well, and know exactly what to to say at exactly the right time, and if you do fumble, then it's almost as though you are showing your weakness.
    - They are more likely to pick you if you are confident and show that you are confident in other areas also. Having confidence will allow you to open up opportunities for yourself. However, it's about having the balance as having too much confidence can be taken in the wrong way and be seen as arrogance.

- You need to be able to talk the talk and walk the walk. However some one may appear confident, and may not be. While someone who may not appear confident, may be extremely able at her job. She would just need her employer to be patient with her to see her true ability.
- I graduated last September, and I am still finding my feet in my first adult job. I had a lot of internal confusion as to what I wanted my career to be. I told a few friends but not anyone of seniority. My manager's really lovely and just sensed it, and took me out for coffee. It's basically having the confidence to voice that you aren't happy and the fact that there are people around you that can help. He was so lovely, he said your role doesn't have to be just this, there's so many other things we can get you started on in the company.

11. Employers/professionals:
    - It is an issue as so many interviews and opportunities are based around presentations. That can have a huge impact on your future, especially if you are being compared to others who have been trained to speak in a certain way from a very young age. I don't think interviews are *not* the greatest way to recruit somebody, but they are still the main barrier for a lot of roles.
    - In extreme circumstances if you don't like speaking to anyone, including to your phone company or at the supermarket, it can really limit you. You miss out on opportunities to learn and meet people from other walks of life. Actually, you can end up having quite a physically limited life. It can impact the people you engage with socially and even at work.
    - It can impact it, but if you're not the most confident speaker it doesn't necessarily mean your life is ruined. Speaking confidence is more about being able to communicate. Being able to speak is great but you also need to be able to listen to people.
    - We had an intern who was doing her first job, so obviously she was going to be very nervous. It is about contextualising it. She was able to communicate her thoughts clearly. However you can't set expectations of how everyone is going to communicate.
    - I don't look at CV's when I interview, I just look at their willingness to learn. Sometimes you are right, sometimes you wrong.
    - Not having the confidence to ask for a promotion or a higher salary. It was connected with how gender plays a role in that and whether men would be more likely to ask for a promotion because of speaking confidence.
    - At meetings it's often who speaks the loudest, who usually is a white middle class male. If someone is a very confident speaker and gets their point across that usually gets preference, however it may not be the best opinion.
    - I had a situation where I did a workshop. A team came and asked for advice. There were four of them and three of them were talking a lot. One person didn't say a word and just listened, and she was the person I ended up hiring, because I kind of felt like she's trying to absorb information. When she started to work with us, she was quite quiet. But over time, she started to develop the confidence to articulate herself and her thoughts.

- It is important to be able to communicate your thoughts, and in a constructive way. And you have to be willing to learn, but it's also not that you have to be the best.
- At the moment, so many employment opportunities are based on a high stakes interview scenario which is really uncomfortable for a lot of people. There's a balance between employers needing to make people feel more comfortable as well as people having to build that level of competence and polish up. But also, providing more support for people to develop those skills so that we don't have big gaps developing between those who have had the support and those who haven't.
- It is important to express what you need and speak out loud. There's going to be situations in life where you do that and you make yourself vulnerable, you get rejected, there's no response, but we need to create safe spaces for people to explore that.

12. **Question: Does speaking confidence impact on wellbeing or other areas in preparing young people for their futures?** (Based on Question 7, Value and impact: What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?)

13. Sixth formers:
- It can be hindering if you don't have the confidence to speak your mind. If you have stuff that's bottling up, it can impact your mental health.
- If you weren't able to address your concerns, and tell your family or friends your issue, it can have an impact on your well-being.
- School is a safe zone where you know who you are speaking to and where you are able to communicate in a familiar environment.
- I think because the environment where I am is smaller it is easier for me. I feel like I can be quiet and still be OK.

14. University students/recent graduates:
- It does impact your mental health. When I first started university, I was anxious from the moment I found out about the presentations to the due date. It can get so bad that I have physical reactions the night before. There is an idea of how we should present, how we should communicate and deliver a presentation and that sometimes is a one size fits all approach which can create anxiety within someone who struggles to present to audiences.
- Not being able to express yourself confidently, it can affect different aspects of your life. That can be making friends, going to a new workplace, it doesn't matter only on a broader scale but it's the little things as well. In the long run your well being will be impacted if you are not able to speak confidently.
- I think it does, especially in preparing young people for their future. If you're not confident, speaking to anyone may be difficult, even making friends might be more daunting, which is such an important kind of skill to have when you're growing up.

15. Employers/professionals:

- Yes I think it definitely does. In particular if you are not able to talk about your feelings to health professionals such as your doctor it can potentially have a huge impact on you.
- There's something about always living with low level anxiety. Everyday if you are worried at work or school that you have to speak, there is an extra burden or strain on you that other people aren't having.
- We identified physical and mental well being. If you are unable to speak confidently, it can affect your ability to make friends, whether that's work or university. If you are unable to make friends it can lead to physical consequences such as isolation.
- I was pitching to raise money. I went to a pitch coach because I was self-conscious about my ability to communicate and get the money. The pitch coach said to me when I was practising that I didn't come across as a risk taker and that was what an entrepreneur is. I guess because I'm more calm and measured when I speak. I took her advice which made me more self-conscious in fact. It made me feel like I could never raise money. A few years later I realised she was talking complete rubbish. Moreso, it was my self-awareness around who I am, knowing what is my comfort area. So now I say if you want to hear me speak you have to sit closer.
- When we are young, it's a really important time for us to understand that we should share our opinions, and also that it's OK for that opinion to be challenged. Even if sometimes we're wrong, it's really important that we are encouraged to share that opinion.
- One of the young people we worked with got some work experience and did a video diary. One of the biggest reflections was that his school environment was all about the grades and being the best, and his work environment taught him that it's OK to make mistakes and it was a more relaxed environment.

16. Contributors:
- Muiiz Ayodele, sixth form student at King's Maths School / We Speak Youth Advisor
- Nithila Darby, sixth form student at King's Maths School / We Speak Youth Advisor
- Rosie Ellis, mental health professional
- Mark Foley, Social Innovation Fellow at Year Here / Whole Education
- Lucy Griffiths, CEO at Sort Your Future
- Patsy Isles, Lead Facilitator at We Speak
- Nermeen Khan, student at Queen Mary University of London / We Speak University Student Facilitator
- Charlotte Lewis, Project Coordinator, Whole Education / Big Education Conversation
- Jessica Magnus, sixth form student at Woodhouse College, We Speak Youth Advisor
- Juwairiah Mussa, student at Goldsmiths University / We Speak University Student Facilitator
- Laura North, CEO at We Speak
- Morenike Padonu, student at Goldsmiths University / We Speak University Student Facilitator

- ■ Nana Parry, CEO at Metier Digital
- ■ Ruby Riley, sixth form student at LaSwap, We Speak Youth Advisor
- ■ Thamasha de Silva, University Partnerships Executive at Access Platform
- ■ Lian Tattersall, sixth form student at King's Maths School / We Speak Youth Advisor

A representative(s) from We Speak would be willing to give oral evidence to the inquiry and we would also be interested in hosting an event or visit.

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?