



Our submission to the Oracy Education Commission

In April 2024, NCS Trust submitted evidence to the Oracy Education Commission. NCS experiences support young people to grow their strengths and build essential skills, including oracy. The commission examines the vital skills of speaking and listening at a time of technological and social change and will shape recommendations that lead to a shift in access to oracy education in England.

The commission responds to the growing recognition of the importance of spoken language to children's learning and life chances and increasing evidence and concern as to the impact of the inconsistency, quality, and accessibility of oracy education in schools across England.

In support of the commission, NCS Trust provided the following evidence.

Why NCS?

NCS is the only dedicated public body for youth. We work closely with the government to shape their ambition for young people. NCS offers a range of enrichment experiences to young people in non-formal settings that support them to grow their strengths and build essential skills. Our experiences boost young people's confidence, support their transition to adulthood, allow them to get involved in social action, make new friends from different backgrounds, and learn new skills, including oracy. As a result of our enrichment programmes, young people have identified speaking skills as one of their top three most improved skills whilst participating in NCS.



Links between oracy education and specific subject outcomes

We see links between oracy education and academic success. The ability to speak eloquently, articulate ideas and thoughts, influence others through talking, listen, and have the confidence to express one's views is fundamental in narrowing the 'word gap' and for cognitive development. Strong oracy skills are also crucial for success beyond school, for example, at college or university and in the workplace.

We believe that oracy education does not have to be undertaken in a formal school setting, and that non-formal learning and participation in youth provision is an essential part of oracy education.

Evidence of oracy education and specific subject outcomes

We don't have direct evidence of the impact on specific subjects, but we know students with strong oracy skills perform better across a range of subjects. For instance, schools implementing the Voice 21 oracy framework have seen notable improvements in student attainment and attitudes towards learning across various subjects.¹



Examples of best practice in oracy education

Best practice in oracy education should recognise the role of both non-formal and formal learning environments in providing oracy education. Non-formal learning and participation in youth provision provide an excellent and proven way to develop oracy education, and help to remove some of the burden from schools.

NCS provides a universal offer for young people to take part in a range of experiences away from home, in their local community and online. Participation in these activities contributes to developing oracy skills. For example, whether collaborating with others on a campaign team, pitching their ideas to others, or arguing their case in the debate chamber, young people use and develop their oracy to thrive in these environments.

We often hear directly from young people about how our experiences help build their speaking skills. For example, one young person told us, "NCS has helped me in many ways. One of them being my communication skills. I always struggled working in a team, however by the end of the programme I could communicate effectively and express my opinions in a much better way."

We also recognise the invaluable contributions of organisations like Voice 21, whose work has helped elevate the status of oracy in education. Voice 21 empowers schools to embed oracy across the curriculum by providing high-quality training and resources for teachers.

Additionally, initiatives such as the National Oracy Pioneers Program, launched by Oracy Cambridge, showcase innovative approaches to oracy education and provide a platform for sharing best practices among educators.

¹Voice 21. [Insights and Impact 2021 - 2022](#): January 2023.

Furthermore, partnerships between schools and community organisations, such as Talk the Talk and The English-Speaking Union, offer valuable opportunities for young people to develop their oracy skills beyond the classroom through debating competitions, public speaking workshops, and other enrichment activities.²

Links between oracy and outcomes in career and business

We know verbal communication skills are highly valued by employers, and repeatedly tops the list of desired skills in the labour market. Oracy education built in non-formal settings like youth provision is key in supporting verbal communication, vocabulary development, and narrowing the 'word gap' - which has been linked to lifelong disparities in academic and social outcomes and lifelong income disparities between disadvantaged young people and their peers.

Evidence of oracy and outcomes in career and business

Studies have shown that individuals with strong communication skills, including oracy, are more likely to secure employment, advance in their careers, and achieve higher income levels.

For example, a National Association of Colleges and Employers survey found that communication skills, including verbal communication, topped the list of attributes employers look for when hiring new graduates.³

Research by the British Chambers of Commerce revealed that businesses consistently prioritise communication skills when recruiting, with 94% of employers considering them crucial for organisational success.⁴

Finally, NCS experiences positively impact young people's skills and employability. A Kantar evaluation of NCS published in 2021 found that two in three NCS participants felt more confident about getting a job in the future as a result of participating in an experience, and two years after doing NCS, participants were still ahead of their peers on key work skills like teamwork, communication and leadership.⁵

Links between oracy and mental health

Oracy plays a crucial role in supporting young people in speaking about the challenges they face, developing relationships, expressing views, and learning from and understanding the perspectives of their peers. Young people with poor communication skills are one and a half times more likely to have mental health difficulties, even after taking account of a range of other factors.⁶



² Voice 21. Insights and Impact 2021 - 2022: January 2023.

³ NACE. Employers: Verbal Communication Most Important Candidate Skill: February 2016.

⁴ British Chambers of Commerce. [Boosting Skills: Journey Through Education and Work](#): February 2024

⁵ NCS Trust. [Five Year Impact Report](#): September 2021.

⁶ Lawton, R. Gramatki, L. and Watt, W. (2019) Happy Days: Does volunteering make us happier or do happier people volunteer? Journal of Happiness Studies, Vol. 22, pp. 599–624.

Evidence of oracy and mental health

We incorporate oracy into our experiences along with other essential skills. While we don't have explicit evidence on the link between oracy as an isolated skill and mental health, we do know that NCS has a positive impact on all four of the Office for National Statistics wellbeing measures - the extent to which they feel the things they do in their life are 'worthwhile', life satisfaction, anxiety, and happiness.⁷

After completing an NCS experience, one young person said: *"NCS made me 100% more confident. I went from not being able to look people in the eye while talking to them, to speaking recently at a conference in front of 5,000 people. If you'd have asked me a couple of years ago if I'd ever do that, I'd have laughed and said, 'no way!'; but when I was asked to do it, I said yes without even thinking about it!"*

Links between oracy, advocacy, and democracy

We understand that oracy is intrinsically linked to advocacy and democracy, serving as a key driver of civic engagement and active participation in democratic processes. Effective advocacy relies on the power of oracy to convey compelling arguments, influence others, and mobilise support for social and political causes. Moreover, oracy fosters critical thinking, empathy, and respectful dialogue, qualities that are essential for informed citizenship and civic engagement.

Evidence of oracy, advocacy, and democracy

NCS provides opportunities for young people to take part in experiences away from home, in their local community, or online, that all work to encourage personal, social, and civic development. These experiences are having a substantial positive effect on young people's political participation — taking part in an NCS experience increases young people's participation in politics by up to 12%.⁸

Organisations like Voice 21 and The English-Speaking Union promote oracy education as a means of empowering individuals to become effective advocates for social justice, human rights, and democratic values. By equipping young people with the skills to express themselves confidently, engage in reasoned debate, and advocate for positive change, oracy serves as a catalyst for democratic participation and social progress.



^{7/8} NCS Trust. [Five Year Impact Report](#); September 2021.

Oracy and government

What role should the government and schools play in oracy education?

NCS welcomes a focus on oracy and the recognition of the importance of building essential skills. We think schools play a vital role in oracy education and supporting young people to develop their skills in an educational setting. However, the youth sector also has extensive expertise in developing oracy skills and helps young people to develop these skills in a different environment, as set out in this submission. We think the role of the youth sector should be better understood and acknowledged by both schools and the government.

A policy to improve oracy education in England

A policy to improve oracy education in England would be a guarantee that all young people have equal access to high-quality enrichment opportunities, and recognition that participation in

enrichment activities within non-formal settings, like youth provision, is a core way for young people to develop their essential skills.

Youth sector provision, including enrichment and non-formal learning, supports young people to develop essential skills, including oracy. However, the schools young people go to, the areas they grow up in, and their socio-economic background still largely determine the opportunities available to them outside of formal education. This means that too many young people are missing out on potentially transformative experiences that help equip them with skills for life and work, with knock-on effects for the UK economy, labour market productivity, and social mobility.

We recently published a report, [Education and Enrichment](#), in partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award that explores how to give more young people access to high-quality enrichment opportunities and we're now working with partners to take forward its recommendations.

