

SPEAKING AND LISTENING AT SCALE

A policy toolkit for high
oracy standards in the
National Curriculum



Contents

1. Executive summary	5
2. A summary of the evidence base for Speaking and Listening in the national curriculum	8
The contemporary imperative for oracy	8
Academic and cognitive advancement – the foundational role of “talk”	8
Employability, economic productivity, and lifelong learning – the economic case	9
Wellbeing, social-emotional development, and civic engagement – the social case	10
Addressing inequality in skill development – the equity case	11
The current landscape and teacher demand – the call for change	11
3. A policy toolkit for high-standards in Speaking and Listening in the national curriculum	16
Introduction: from vision to practical implementation	16
3.1. Clear, progressive, age- and stage-related expectations	17
Rationale	17
Illustrative research base	17
Learning from other policies	18
The current gap and the need for a framework	19
Examples of best practice	20
Policy Recommendation 1	26
3.2. A knowledge-rich base for skills	27
Learning from other policies	28
Components of the knowledge base	29
Examples of best practice	30
Policy Recommendation 2	32
3.3. Drawing on international best practice	33
Rationale	33
Illustrative research base	33
Learning from other policies	34
International Examples of Good Practice	35
A consistent UK skills taxonomy	36
Policy Recommendation 3	37

3.4. Robust and varied assessment methods	38
Rationale	38
Illustrative research base	38
Learning from other policies	39
A balanced approach to assessment	40
Examples of best practice	41
Existing assessment: certification	41
Policy Recommendation 4	42
3.5. High-quality teacher training and development	43
Rationale	43
Illustrative research base	43
Learning from other policies	44
Essential components of teacher training and development	45
The role of pedagogical principles and resources	45
Examples of best practice	47
Policy Recommendation 5	47
3.6. Explicit teaching and structured practice	48
Rationale	48
Illustrative research base	48
Learning from other policies	50
Implementation in the Curriculum	51
Examples of best practice	51
Policy Recommendation 6	54
3.7. Inclusivity and equity	55
Rationale	55
Illustrative research base	56
Learning from other policies	57
Inclusive pedagogical strategies	57
Examples of best practice	58
Policy Recommendation 7	60
3.8. Linking into employment, careers and other settings	61
Rationale	61
Illustrative research base	61
Learning from other policies	63
Interoperability with Employment and Other Settings	64
Examples of best practice	65
Policy Recommendation 8	66

3.9. Compatibility with other skills and taxonomies	67
Rationale	67
Illustrative research base	67
Learning from other policies	69
Compatibility with other skills and taxonomies	69
Examples of best practice	70
Policy Recommendation 9	70
4. Case studies: Speaking and Listening in action	71
Showcasing what it looks like in practice - the "How To"	71
Primary school	71
Secondary school	72
Further Education Colleges	73
Annex: Mapping recommendations from the <i>We Need to Talk</i> report into actionable policies in this toolkit	75
Annex: Speaking and Listening in the Universal Framework 2.0	78
Annex: Knowledge-Base examples from Educators Handbook	81

1. Executive summary

This toolkit builds off the Oracy Education Commission's *We Need to Talk* report to provide a detailed blueprint for formally integrating Speaking and Listening skills - also called oracy - into the national curriculum.

The *We Need to Talk* report identified a "patchy and inconsistent" national picture of oracy provision.¹ This paper offers a transparent, actionable, and unifying structure for skill development.

With research summaries, learnings from other policies and case studies, it acts as a useful tool for policy makers. Building speaking and listening in schools through the national curriculum presents a huge opportunity to break down barriers to opportunity by preparing learners for life and work.

However, there are several risks that could jeopardise the success of speaking and listening in the curriculum:

1. A lack of rigorous standards, including age-related expectations and progression
2. Lack of a knowledge base that underpins each element of speaking and listening
3. Ignoring how these skills link into employment
4. Incompatibility with the other essential skills for life and work
5. No approach to formative assessment and teacher training
6. Failure to learn from international best-practice
7. Increasing inequality of education outcomes

The paper sets out solutions to avoid each of these risks. By adopting them, we can ensure that oracy does not fail as a policy, but is instead seen to be a successful change to the education system.

¹ We Need to Talk: The report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England, 2024

In an era defined by rapid technological advancement, complex societal challenges, and the critical need for effective human interaction, these essential skills are foundational for academic achievement, economic participation, and engaged citizenship. The ability to “Identify Influence: recognise when someone is trying to influence you” (Step 11 Listening) or “Investigating bias: analysing where bias is shown” (Step 14 Listening) alongside “Communicating sensitively: talking about difficult or sensitive topics effectively” (Step 10 Speaking) are a fundamental prerequisite for young people to navigate and shape their world.

We present a practical, evidence-based policy toolkit designed to ensure all young people develop high-calibre Speaking and Listening skills. It is built upon core principles of clear progression, a comprehensive knowledge base, robust and varied assessment, high-quality teacher education, explicit instruction with ample practice, and a steadfast commitment to inclusivity and equity. It moves beyond acknowledging the importance of these skills to outlining a clear, actionable pathway for their cultivation.

The core components necessary for success are:

- 1. Clear, progressive, age-related expectations.** The adoption of a nationally recognised, evidence-based approach for Speaking and Listening skills from Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through Key Stage 4 and into Post-16 education, detailing clear, teachable steps and age-related expectations.
- 2. A knowledge-rich base for skills.** Behind every step of speaking and listening there should be a consistent knowledge-base of what that element of the skill consists of, why it is important and how to practice, teach and measure it.
- 3. Drawing on international good practice.** The development of national guidance informed by best practices and learnings from across the globe in oracy and skills education.
- 4. Robust and varied assessment methods.** A balanced assessment strategy that prioritises diagnostic and formative assessment to enhance learning, alongside the exploration and piloting of robust, multimodal summative methods.
- 5. High-quality teacher training and development.** Comprehensive training in Speaking and Listening pedagogy for early years workers, within Initial Teacher Training (ITT), the Early Career Framework (ECF), and funded, accessible Continuing Professional Development (CPD), including pathways for specialist leadership.

- 6. Explicit teaching and structured practice.** Focusing tightly on the different steps of speaking and listening skills, teaching knowledge about them within curriculum subjects alongside the opportunity to apply and practice the skills.
- 7. Inclusivity and equity.** A resolute focus on social justice and equity, ensuring all national Speaking and Listening initiatives provide targeted support and resources for diverse learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or English as an Additional Language (EAL).
- 8. Linking into employment, careers and other settings.** Successful policy will be complementary to the vital work that exists across the education system. To prepare young people for life and work, policy will need to close the speaking and listening gap identified by employers. Critically, the DfE should align with speaking and listening requirements in its own Statutory Careers Guidance.
- 9. Compatibility with other skills and taxonomies.** Oracy should be built in a way that is compatible with other essential skills like creativity, problem solving, adapting and teamwork. To achieve systemic impact, the Department's approach should be interoperable with a clear interface to other skills and taxonomies and the work of Skills England.

This approach has strong backing from teaching professionals. A large majority (86%) agree that the national curriculum should include essential skills including speaking and listening, with almost half (47%) agreeing strongly.² A similar number (87%) of teachers want to see the adoption of a universal framework for essential skills including speaking and listening. However, they also identify the barriers of requiring teaching resources, pedagogy and training.

Rigorous and systematic development of Speaking and Listening skills, as outlined in this toolkit, will yield significant and wide-ranging benefits. It will enhance students' academic performance across all subjects, improve their social-emotional wellbeing and confidence, boost their future employability and economic prospects, contribute to narrowing persistent achievement gaps, and foster a more articulate, critical, and engaged society. The imperative to act is clear; the potential rewards, both for individuals and for the nation, are immense. This paper offers a viable, research-based pathway to realise this potential.

² Craig & Stewart (2024). Essential Skills Tracker 2024.

2. A summary of the evidence base for Speaking and Listening in the national curriculum

The imperative to fully integrate Speaking and Listening skills into the National Curriculum is driven by a confluence of contemporary societal demands, robust educational research, compelling economic arguments, and a clear call for equity in skill development. These skills are not merely desirable additions to a crowded curriculum; they are fundamental enablers of learning, personal development, and future success.

The contemporary imperative for oracy

We live in an "increasingly fractured and fractious society",³ characterised by rapid technological change, the pervasive influence of digital media, and complex social and political discourse. In this environment, the ability for young people to ask questions, analyse bias is more critical than ever. The Oracy Education Commission's report compellingly argues that oracy will play a vital role in preparing young people to flourish as engaged and thoughtful citizens.⁴ Furthermore, the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation underscores the increasing value of uniquely human skills, such as nuanced communication, critical thinking, and interpersonal engagement, which oracy can support if implemented in an appropriately compatible way.⁵

Academic and cognitive advancement – the foundational role of “talk”

A substantial body of evidence confirms that Speaking and Listening are not just communication tools but are conduits to cognitive development and academic success. These skills are "essential building blocks for reading and writing"⁶, and their development is strongly correlated with higher academic achievement across all subjects, including foundational literacy and numeracy. A meta-analysis by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) found that oral language interventions can lead to an average of six months' additional academic progress for students.⁷

³ We Need to Talk: The report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England, 2024

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Craig & Stewart (2025). Essential Skills Tracker: Driving social mobility & growth through the AI transition

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Education Endowment Foundation. Oral language interventions toolkit.

Dialogic teaching approaches, which explicitly harness "the power of talk to stimulate and extend students' thinking, learning, knowing and understanding"⁸, have been shown to significantly improve pupil engagement, deepen understanding, and enhance attainment. The quality of "classroom talk", particularly cognitively challenging interactions, is a key determinant of learning outcomes.⁹

The importance of these skills begins in the earliest years. Longitudinal studies consistently demonstrate that early language proficiency, encompassing vocabulary, syntax, and speech sound maturity at age 3, is a powerful predictor of later reading skills, including decoding, comprehension, and oral reading fluency.¹⁰ Children who experience delays in their early language development are at a significantly higher risk for subsequent reading difficulties.¹¹ Research by Kashefpakdel & Ravenscroft (2021), found that higher levels of essential skills, including Speaking and Listening, were directly linked with better academic performance at both age 10 and age 16.¹² This underscores the long-term academic impact of early and sustained oracy development.

Employability, economic productivity, and lifelong learning – the economic case

The economic arguments for prioritising Speaking and Listening skills are compelling. Employers across all sectors consistently identify communication skills as among the most critical attributes they seek in their workforce, yet they frequently report significant gaps in these skills among school leavers and graduates. This disconnect between demand and supply has tangible economic consequences. The Essential Skills Tracker 2023 estimated that boosting essential skill levels in the UK workforce, including Speaking and Listening, could yield an annual productivity gain of £22.2 billion.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Liu, J., Li, S. & Wang, Q. (2024) The Relationship Between Teacher Talk and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 36, 25.

¹⁰ Pettit, J., & Hogan, T. P. (2013). Effects of early language, speech, and cognition on later language and reading skills in children with and without histories of language delay. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4

¹¹ Farquharson, K., Hogan, T. P., Hoffman, L., Wang, J., Green, K. F., & Green, J. R. (2018). A longitudinal study of infants' early speech production and later letter identification. *PloS one*, 13(10), e0204006. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0204006>

¹² Kashefpakdel, E. & Ravenscroft, R. (2021). Essential skills and their impact on education outcomes

At an individual level, research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has found that Speaking and Listening, alongside other essential skills, are a predictor of income.¹³ Research using the Universal Framework for essential skills finds that moving from the lower to upper quartile of skill score is equated to an annual wage increase of between 9% to 12% and a 25% reduction in the odds of being unemployed.¹⁴

These findings are further corroborated by international studies highlighting the economic advantages conferred by strong English language and oral communication proficiency.¹⁵ In a rapidly evolving world of work, characterised by technological disruption and the need for continuous adaptation, the ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and engage in lifelong learning is indispensable. Speaking and Listening skills are central to this adaptability and are foundational for ongoing professional development and career progression.

Wellbeing, social-emotional development, and civic engagement – the social case

The benefits of oracy extend far beyond academic and economic realms, playing a crucial role in students' social and emotional wellbeing. The development of Speaking and Listening skills is linked to increased self-confidence, higher self-esteem, greater resilience, enhanced empathy, and the ability to build and maintain positive interpersonal relationships.¹⁶ As the *We Need to Talk* report notes, this is particularly vital in the context of rising concerns about child and adolescent mental health, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷

Individuals with higher levels of speaking and listening skills as measured by the open-source Universal Framework also enjoy higher job satisfaction, wellbeing and social mobility.¹⁸

Effective communication skills are fundamental to active and engaged citizenship. Oracy can empower young people to articulate their perspectives, participate meaningfully in discussions and debates, critically evaluate information, understand diverse viewpoints, and contribute constructively to their communities and to democratic processes.

¹³ NFER (2024). Rethinking skills gaps and solutions (The Skills Imperative 2035)

¹⁴ Craig & Stewart (2025). Essential Skills Tracker: Driving social mobility and growth through the AI transition

¹⁵ British Council. The English Effect.

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Craig & Seymour (2023). Essential Skills Tracker 2023

Addressing inequality in skill development – the equity case

A critical reason for embedding Speaking and Listening robustly within the National Curriculum is the pursuit of educational equity. Currently, opportunities for young people to develop these essential skills are unevenly distributed. Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with SEND, often have less access to environments rich in structured oral language development, which can exacerbate existing inequalities in achievement and later life chances.¹⁹

A universal, curriculum-embedded approach to Speaking and Listening can serve as a powerful lever for "levelling the playing field".²⁰ The Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry report, 'Speak for Change', explicitly highlights that high-quality oracy education disproportionately benefits students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) or other SEND.²¹ By making these skills an explicit entitlement for all, the National Curriculum can help to mitigate the impact of background on a child's ability to develop a confident and effective voice.

The current landscape and teacher demand – the call for change

Despite the overwhelming evidence of their importance, spoken language development often receives insufficient attention and clarity within the current National Curriculum. The *We Need to Talk* report notes that its role has been "downgraded" in favour of a greater focus on reading and writing.²² This systemic undervaluation is not reflective of the views of those at the forefront of education.

Teachers themselves recognise the profound importance of these skills and express a strong desire for greater support and a clearer framework to teach them effectively. The Essential Skills Tracker 2024 revealed that 98% of teaching professionals view essential skills as important for their students' future employment opportunities, and 92% see them as important for success in education itself.²³ Significantly, 87% of teachers support the implementation of a universal framework to guide the teaching of essential skills.²⁴ This

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Final report and recommendations from the Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry (2021). *Speak for Change*.

²² *ibid*

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid*

indicates a clear readiness and appetite within the teaching profession for a more structured and prioritised approach to Speaking and Listening.

The convergence of societal need, academic benefit, economic imperative, social advantage, equity concerns, and teacher demand creates an undeniable case for the formal and rigorous integration of Speaking and Listening skills into the National Curriculum. These are not optional extras but core competencies that underpin success in education and in life.

The relationship between these skills and broader educational success is not merely correlational; it is often causal. Strong oral language skills facilitate better comprehension, allow students to articulate their understanding and misunderstandings, engage more deeply with learning material through discussion and questioning, and process complex information more effectively. This "multiplier effect" means that an investment in Speaking and Listening is an investment in raising standards across the entire curriculum.

However, a significant "Oracy Paradox" exists: despite the high demand from employers, parents, and teachers, and the wealth of evidence supporting their impact, these skills receive comparatively low systemic priority in terms of explicit curriculum time, robust assessment, and dedicated teacher training when compared to literacy and numeracy.²⁵ This discrepancy suggests a historical undervaluation or systemic inertia that current policies must address. The clear implication is that the education system is not fully aligned with the needs of its stakeholders or the evidence base, highlighting a critical opportunity for impactful policy reform.

Benefit Area	Key Evidence/Finding	Source
Academic Outcomes	Oral language interventions, on average, result in approximately six months of additional academic progress for students over a year.	Education Endowment Foundation, "Oral language interventions"
	A meta-analysis of 51 studies showed that collaborative learning approaches, which are language-rich, can lead to an additional five months of academic progress within a single year.	Education Endowment Foundation, "Collaborative learning approaches"
	There is a strong positive correlation between students' essential skill levels and academic attainment. A one-point increase in a primary	Centre for Education and Youth, "Essential Skills and their Impact on Education"

²⁵ *ibid*

	student's essential skill score is associated with a 5% greater likelihood of them achieving the expected standard at Key Stage 2.	Outcomes"
	92% of secondary school teachers believe that building Speaking and Listening, alongside other essential skills, is as or more important than academic qualifications for their students' success.	Skills Builder Partnership, "Essential Skills Tracker 2024"
	Strong oral language skills are foundational for literacy. Developing these skills is linked to improved reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing.	Voice 21, "Oracy & reading"; Pearson, "Making the connection between oracy and reading"
	Non-cognitive skills measured at age 10 and 16 (including social skills) are strong predictors of later academic success, including higher attainment at GCSE level.	Education Endowment Foundation / Cabinet Office, "The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people"
Social and Emotional Development	The development of oracy skills is linked to increased student confidence, self-esteem, and overall well-being.	Research Schools Network, "How oracy education gives confidence and a voice"; NACE, "5 reasons to teach oracy skills in your classroom"
	Workers with higher levels of Speaking and Listening, alongside other essential skills, report higher levels of wellbeing, greater job satisfaction, and more optimism about the future of work in the age of AI.	Skills Builder Partnership, "Essential Skills Tracker 2025"
	Oracy education fosters the development of empathy and the ability to understand different perspectives through active listening and structured dialogue.	Chartered College, "An inclusive oracy approach"; Michigan State University Extension, "Active listening and empathy for human connection"
Equity and Social Mobility	There is a significant "participation gap" in access to skill-building extra-curricular activities. Children from high-income families are almost twice as likely to take	Department for Education, The Sutton Trust, "Life Lessons: The impact of

	part in music classes and four times as likely to engage in drama and dance.	extra-curricular activities on education and employment"
	The labor market increasingly rewards social skills, and the wage returns for these "people skills" are often higher for women and underrepresented groups, suggesting that improving these skills can help reduce economic inequalities.	Deming, D. (Harvard University), Research on "People Skills"
Employability and Economic Outcomes	Employers consistently report skill gaps in their workforce, with communication skills being among the most cited deficiencies. These gaps are seen as a significant barrier to business performance and productivity.	NFER, "Rethinking skills gaps and solutions" (The Skills Imperative 2035)
	A survey by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) found that 82% of employers ranked attitudes and aptitude for work, which includes communication, as a top-three factor when recruiting graduates.	CBI, "Skills for an inclusive economy" (2021)
	There is a substantial wage premium for essential skills. An increase of one point in an individual's average skill score (on a 10-point scale) is associated with a wage premium of £3,900.	Skills Builder Partnership, "Essential Skills Tracker 2023"
	Essential skills are critical for navigating the AI transition. Workers who frequently use AI and have high essential skill levels can earn an "AI-augmented" wage premium of up to £8,900 more than their peers.	Skills Builder Partnership, "Essential Skills Tracker 2025"
	Research from The Sutton Trust shows that highly extraverted individuals (displaying traits such as confidence and assertiveness) have a 25% greater likelihood of being in a high-earning job.	The Sutton Trust, "A Winning Personality"
Civic Engagement	The ability to articulate and advocate for one's views is fundamental to active participation in a democratic society.	English-Speaking Union, "What is oracy and why is it so important?"
	Oracy provides young people with the skills to engage in reasoned debate and deliberation, preparing them to be active and reflective citizens.	Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group (as cited by the Research

		Schools Network)
International Precedent & Curriculum Design	Leading international education systems, including Singapore, Finland, and Ontario (Canada), have explicitly integrated "21st-century skills" like communication into their national curricula as a core component of preparing students for the future.	NFER, "International comparisons of skills development" (The Skills Imperative 2035)
	The success of international models is built on a systemic approach, where skills are not just listed but are supported by curriculum frameworks, teacher training, and assessment tools to ensure they are taught explicitly and consistently.	NFER, "International comparisons of skills development" (The Skills Imperative 2035)
	England is an outlier in not having an explicit skills curriculum - including for speaking and listening. International comparison highlights the importance of coherence across the economic, social, and cultural context as well as in the education system.	Sheffield Institute of Education, "Generic skills in the 14-19 curriculum: an international review"

Figure 1: Thematic Summary of Evidence on the Multifaceted Benefits of Speaking and Listening Skills

3. A Policy toolkit for high-standards in Speaking and Listening in the National Curriculum

Introduction: from vision to practical implementation

The *We Need to Talk* report issued a compelling call for oracy to be recognised as a core and indispensable aspect of every child's education.²⁶ This policy blueprint seeks to build upon that foundational vision, translating its high-level recommendations into a practical, actionable, and evidence-based framework for the Department for Education (DfE). The objective is to provide a clear roadmap for the systematic and rigorous integration of Speaking and Listening skills into the National Curriculum, thereby ensuring that all students in England have an equal opportunity to develop these skills to a high standard.

The central premise of this blueprint is that achieving high standards in Speaking and Listening is not an ad-hoc endeavour but requires a deliberate and structured approach. This involves establishing clear, evidence-informed criteria for what constitutes high-quality Speaking and Listening education. Subsequently, it will be demonstrated how a systematic and progressive framework is required to meet these demanding criteria, providing the necessary architecture for successful national implementation.

²⁶ *ibid*

3.1. Clear, progressive, age- and stage-related expectations

Rationale

The development of complex skills such as Speaking and Listening is an incremental process that unfolds over time. For a curriculum to effectively cultivate these skills to a high standard, it must be underpinned by clear, progressive learning expectations that are appropriately pitched for different age groups and developmental stages, from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through to Key Stage 4 and informing post-16 pathways. Such a structure ensures that skills are built systematically, with each part laying the foundation for the next, preventing gaps in learning and fostering coherent development.

Illustrative research base

Harlen, W. (2010). *The quality of learning: A paper for the review of the national curriculum in England*. The Cambridge Primary Review.

- Harlen argues that for learning to be of high quality, it must be developmental. This paper emphasizes that a curriculum framework should be based on established sequences of conceptual development.
- Without clear progression, learning can be fragmented and superficial. The author contends that age-related expectations are essential for teachers to plan appropriate learning experiences and to identify students who may need additional support.

Linn, M. C. (2008). Teaching for conceptual change: A review of the literature. In S. Vosniadou (Ed.), *International handbook of research on conceptual change* (pp. 57-78). Routledge.

- This review of research on conceptual change demonstrates that students come to classrooms with pre-existing ideas, and learning often requires a significant shift in their thinking.
- Linn's work supports the need for a curriculum that is designed to address these cognitive shifts in a deliberate and sequential manner. Age- and stage-related expectations help teachers to anticipate common misconceptions and to structure learning experiences that guide students toward more expert-like understanding.

Duschl, R. A., Schweingruber, H. A., & Shouse, A. W. (Eds.). (2007). *Taking Science to School: Learning and Teaching Science in Grades K-8*. National Academies Press.

- This report from the U.S. National Research Council strongly advocates for the use of "learning progressions" in science education. It synthesizes a vast body of research to show that expertise in science develops over a long period in a predictable sequence.
- The report argues that for a curriculum to be effective and for instruction to be coherent, it must be structured around these evidence-based progressions of learning.

Learning from other policies

- Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)
 - Intentionally moved away from rigid age-related benchmarks to empower teachers.
 - Despite its laudable vision, a central and persistent criticism is that its lack of a clear, structured framework for progression and assessment has significantly hampered its implementation and success.²⁷²⁸
 - Mark Priestley and Walter Humes, two of Scotland's leading education academics, famously critiqued CfE as being "incoherently structured".²⁹
 - Academics and educators have called for clear guidance that provides "coherence and progression".³⁰

²⁷ OECD (2021). [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future](#).

²⁸ Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2020. Advice Paper.

²⁹ Priestley, M., & Humes, W. (2010). [The Development of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: amnesia and déjà vu](#). Oxford Review of Education, 36(3), 345-361.

³⁰

- California's "Whole Language" Reading Instruction Movement
 - During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the educational philosophy of "whole language" became official policy in California and other US states. This approach rejected the explicit, sequential teaching of phonics.
 - This policy is widely regarded as having led to a dramatic decline in literacy rates. The state's ranking in national reading tests plummeted, prompting a complete reversal of the policy.³¹
 - The influential report of the National Reading Panel (2000), commissioned by the US Congress, concluded from a vast review of evidence that explicit, systematic phonics instruction was a critical component of successful reading instruction.³²

The current gap and the need for a framework

A significant challenge in the current educational landscape is the lack of a universally adopted, detailed framework for Speaking and Listening. As highlighted in "Essential Skills at Scale" and strongly echoed by teacher demand for greater clarity and support in "Essential Skills Tracker 2024", the absence of such a model leads to ill-defined expectations and makes consistent progression difficult to achieve and monitor.³³³⁴ The *We Need to Talk* report's call for a defined "oracy entitlement" for all students highlights this need for clearly articulated, progressive learning goals.³⁵

The adoption of a nationally recognised, progressive approach for Speaking and Listening from Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through Key Stage 4 and into Post-16 education could set clear, age-related expectations.

³¹ Ravitch, D. (2000). *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*. Simon & Schuster.

³² National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*. U.S. Government Printing Office.

³³ Chan & Ravenscroft (2024). *Essential Skills at Scale*.

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ *ibid*

Examples of best practice

A robust, evidence-based framework provides the necessary architecture to establish and implement clear, progressive, and age-related expectations. The open-source Universal Framework 2.0 serves as a concrete example of such a structure. It meticulously breaks down Speaking and Listening into 16 granular, teachable steps for each skill. These steps are logically sequenced across four developmental stages: 'Getting Started', 'Intermediate', 'Advanced', and 'Mastery'. This step-by-step progression, from foundational abilities like Listening Step 1 "Focusing: I can listen for at least a short time" to advanced competencies like Speaking Step 16 "Inspiring others: I communicate a vision persuasively", inherently supports the establishment of meaningful age-related expectations and allows for the tracking of individual learner journeys.

The establishment of a common language for progression is a powerful outcome of adopting a national framework. When educators, learners, parents, and employers share a consistent understanding of what specific Speaking and Listening skills entail at different developmental stages, the entire education ecosystem benefits.

This shared lexicon, as provided by a detailed framework like the open-source Universal Framework 2.0, facilitates coherent curriculum planning across and between schools, enables more consistent and reliable assessment practices, supports smoother transitions for students between key stages and educational settings, and allows for clearer communication of skill development to all stakeholders.

Analysis of the only big data sets of speaking and listening ability (from three different sources and over 6 million data points) was against the Universal Framework 1.0. This not only revealed the value of the progressive nature of the framework, but also enabled further refinement in version 2.0 so that it is the most carefully calibrated way of building and measuring speaking and listening for age- and stage-related expectations globally.³⁶

³⁶Ravenscroft, T., Craig, R. & Stewart, G. (2025) Universal Framework Review 2025: Final Report.

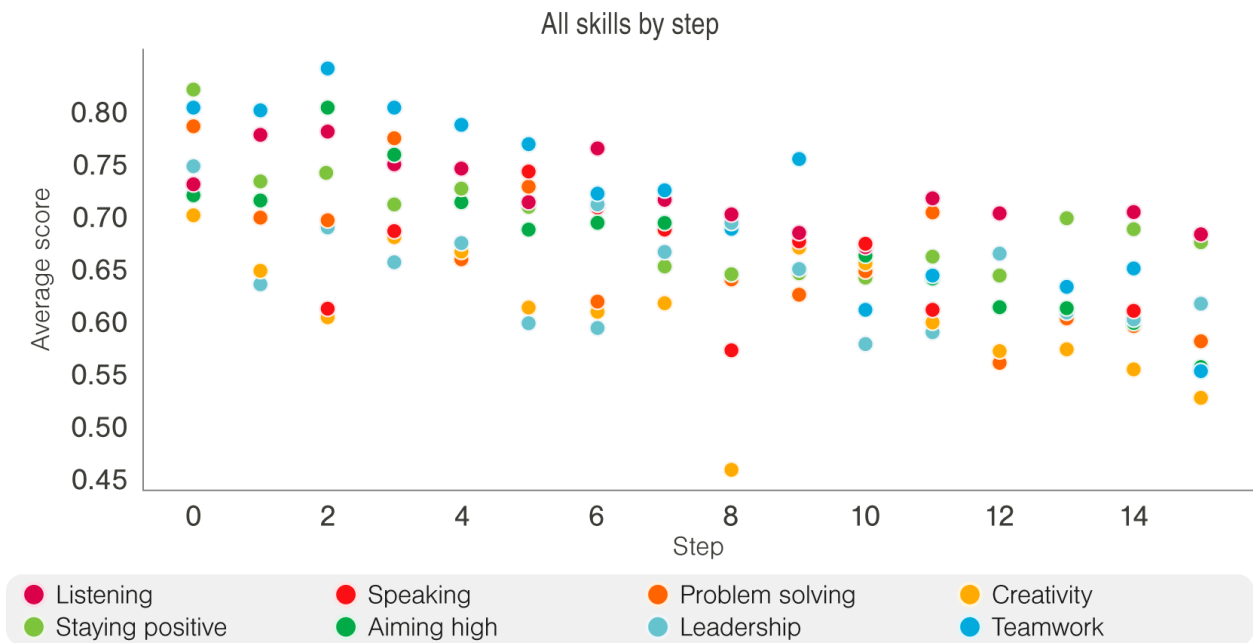


Figure 2: Essential Skills Tracker 2023 average response for each step

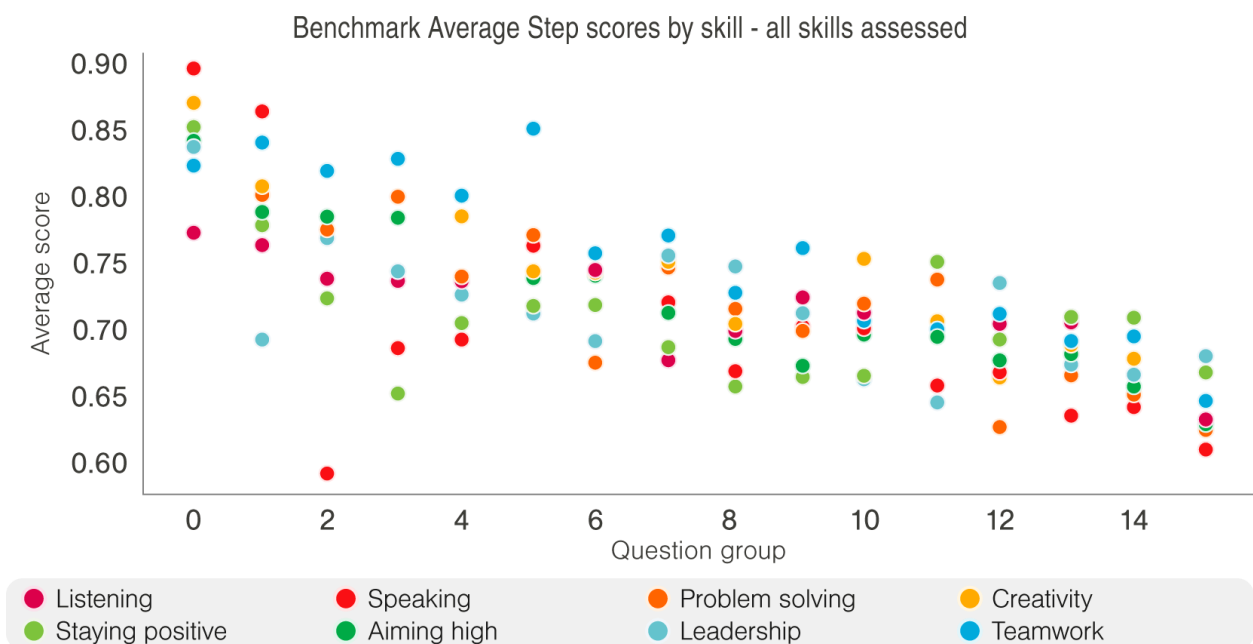


Figure 3: Skills Builder Benchmark average response for each step

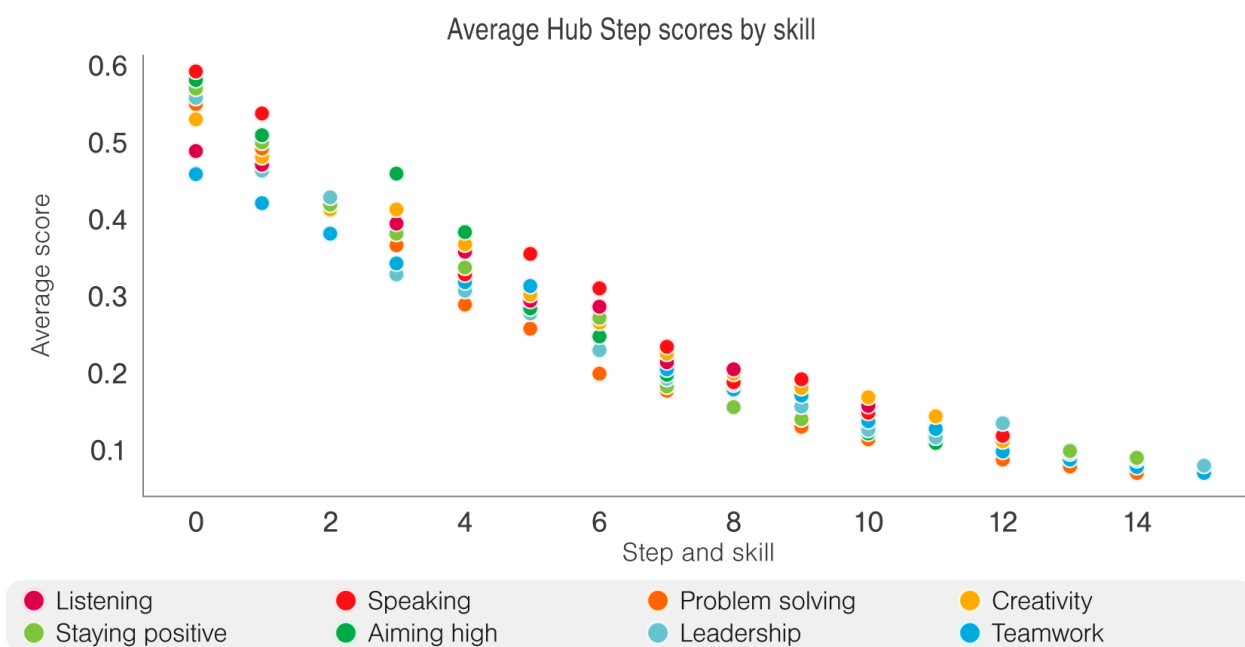


Figure 4: Skills Builder Hub average response for each step

Adopting this approach solves the "patchy and inconsistent" national picture of oracy provision identified by the *We Need to Talk* report, by offering a transparent, actionable, and unifying structure for skill development.³⁷

Simple age- or stage-related expectations

Educators find it helpful to use this age and stage related expectations as a guide. For example, here are the expectations for Speaking from the Universal Framework 2.0.

Stage	Step Number	Step Summary and Descriptor
Getting started (Potential target for ages 5-9)	Step 1	<i>Sharing clearly:</i> I communicate clearly with someone I know
	Step 2	<i>Discussing together:</i> I communicate clearly in a small group
	Step 3	<i>Meeting others:</i> I communicate with new people when I need to

³⁷ ibid

	Step 4	<i>Organising thoughts:</i> I order my points to be understood
Intermediate (Potential target for ages 9-13)	Step 5	<i>Knowing the audience:</i> I adapt my communication to what my audience already know
	Step 6	<i>Choosing language:</i> I choose appropriate language for the situation
	Step 7	<i>Expressing self:</i> I use tone, expression and gesture to be understood
	Step 8	<i>Using facts:</i> I use facts and examples to support my communication
Advanced (Potential target for ages 13-17)	Step 9	<i>Sharing visuals:</i> I use images, charts or diagrams when it helps my communication
	Step 10	<i>Communicating sensitively:</i> I talk about difficult or sensitive topics effectively
	Step 11	<i>Speaking engagingly:</i> I communicate in a way that is engaging for my audience
	Step 12	<i>Adaptive communicating:</i> I adapt my communication depending on audience reactions
Mastery (Potential target for ages 17+)	Step 13	<i>Negotiating:</i> I manage discussions effectively to reach an agreement
	Step 14	<i>Constructive communicating:</i> I maintain clear and constructive communication in challenging situations
	Step 15	<i>Presenting:</i> I present to an audience when required
	Step 16	<i>Inspiring others:</i> I communicate a vision persuasively

Four-step range for practicing

When designing cross-curricular learning to practice essential skills, a broader target range can be helpful. This means that while completing activities using subject content and

essential skills, learners can be working at different step levels while still making a contribution and practicing the skills deliberately.

Year group	Below expectations	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Exceeding expectations
Pre Year 1	Step 1A*	Step 1A+B*	Step 1A+B+C*	Step 1
Year 1	Step 1A+B*	Step 1A+B+C*	Step 1	Step 2
Year 2	Step 1A+B+C*	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Year 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Year 4	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Year 5	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Year 6	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
Year 7	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8
Year 8	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9
Year 9	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9	Step 10
Year 10	Step 8	Step 9	Step 10	Step 11
Year 11	Step 9	Step 10	Step 11	Step 12
Year 12	Step 10	Step 11	Step 12	Step 13
Year 13	Step 11	Step 12	Step 13	Step 14

As an example, in practice this looks like:

Speaking: Age-related expectations				
	Below expectations	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Exceeding expectations
Year 7	Step 5: Knowing the audience I adapt my communication to what my audience already know	Step 6: Choosing language I choose appropriate language for the situation	Step 7: Expressing self I use tone, expression and gesture to be understood	Step 8: Using facts I use facts and examples to support my communication

As learners get older, the range of steps that they might be working at expands as they pursue different courses and qualifications at different levels. As such, it's important to understand the level learners are working at and where their development needs are in each skill.

Policy Recommendation 1

The DfE should formally adopt and champion a nationally recognised, evidence-based approach for Speaking and Listening skills.

This approach must:

- detail clear, progressive, and teachable steps, with associated age- and stage- related expectations, spanning EYFS to Key Stage 4 and informing Post-16 provision.
- score highly when analysed against international standards. This means it must carefully balance comprehensiveness with relevance while minimising duplication.
- have evidence of these features being successful at scale, with widescale adoption across all settings.

3.2. A knowledge-rich base for skills

Rationale

The development of high standards in Speaking and Listening is not solely about performance or practice; it fundamentally requires an explicit and comprehensive understanding of *how* language and communication operate. This "learning about talk," as emphasised in the *We Need to Talk* report,³⁸ encompasses knowledge of linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, discourse structures, and the socio-cultural nuances of communication. Such a knowledge base empowers students to become more reflective, adaptable, and ultimately, more effective communicators.⁴

Illustrative research base

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). (Updated 2024). *Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning Guidance Report*.

- Influential report synthesises the best available international and UK evidence. It concludes that explicitly teaching pupils metacognitive strategies - how to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning - is one of the most cost-effective ways to improve academic outcomes.
- The report provides schools with actionable recommendations, such as explicitly teaching pupils knowledge about learning strategies, modelling the thought processes of a skill, and providing opportunities for structured reflection. Its widespread adoption in UK schools highlights a major policy and practice shift towards valuing knowledge of skills.

Carden, J., & Wood, P. (2018). The great skills debate: An analysis of UK government policy. *Journal of Education and Work*, 31(1), 14-27.

- This paper provides an analysis of UK government policy regarding skills. The authors note a persistent tension and a gradual shift in policy discourse from focusing on discrete, vocational skills towards valuing broader "transferable skills" underpinned by metacognitive understanding.
- They argue that for skills policies to be effective, they must address how learners acquire not just the skill, but the knowledge of how to adapt and apply it in different

³⁸ *ibid*

situations—a core argument for the importance of self-regulation and metacognitive knowledge in the UK's economic and educational future.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner: An Overview. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(2), 64–70.

- Zimmerman's highly-cited work on self-regulated learning shows that effective learners are proactive in their own learning process. A key component of this is "strategic planning," which involves selecting appropriate strategies for a task. To do this, a learner must possess knowledge *about* a repertoire of cognitive skills (e.g., summarization, mnemonics, critical analysis).
- Without knowledge of the skills themselves, a student cannot strategically select or deploy them to tackle a new problem effectively.

Pressley, M., & Harris, K. R. (2006). Cognitive Strategies Instruction: From Basic Research to Classroom Instruction. In P. A. Alexander & P. H. Winne (Eds.), *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 265–286).

- This research synthesises decades of work on "strategies instruction." The authors show that explicitly teaching students the "what, why, when, and how" of cognitive strategies (e.g., how to summarize, how to generate questions) significantly improves their academic performance.
- The core finding is that skills do not develop implicitly; students need direct instruction about the skill itself to understand its purpose and apply it effectively and independently.

Learning from other policies

- Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)
 - The OECD found a "disconnect between the concepts of knowledge, skills and attitudes or capabilities and attributes".
- "New Math" Movement
 - A government-funded policy push to reform mathematics education in North America and Europe. The goal was to shift the curriculum away from rote

memorisation of arithmetic procedures and toward a deeper, conceptual understanding of abstract mathematical principles.³⁹

- Critics argued that the policy had little input from educationalists and practitioners, resulting in a curriculum that was developmentally inappropriate. It ignored the cognitive reality that a firm grasp of procedural knowledge (how to do arithmetic) is essential for building a higher-level conceptual understanding.^{40 41}

Components of the knowledge base

A curriculum aspiring to high standards must equip students with knowledge across the multifaceted dimensions of oracy. These dimensions are reflected in the detailed structure of the Universal Framework and other frameworks like the Oracy Framework and include:

- **Physical aspects:** Understanding the effective use of voice (projection, pace, pitch, tone), body language, posture, gesture, and eye contact to convey meaning and engage an audience.
- **Linguistic aspects:** Developing a rich vocabulary, understanding grammatical structures, mastering appropriate registers for different contexts and audiences, and learning about rhetorical devices that enhance communication.
- **Cognitive aspects:** Acquiring skills in selecting and structuring content, formulating and justifying arguments, clarifying ideas, summarising information accurately, engaging in logical reasoning, and managing one's own contributions to a discussion effectively.
- **Social-Emotional aspects:** Learning the conventions of effective interaction, such as turn-taking, active and responsive listening, adapting to audience needs and feedback, building rapport, managing disagreements constructively, and developing confidence in speaking.

³⁹ National Adaptation Of New Math As A Cold War 'Globally'-disseminated Idea In Luxembourg: Confrontation Of National Values And International Urges. 2015.
Shaghayegh Nadimi Amiri

⁴⁰ Phillips, C. J. (2014). In accordance with a 'more majestic order': the new math and the new education in the new frontier. *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 7(1), 58-83.

⁴¹ National Advisory Committee on Mathematical Education (NACOME). (1975). *Overview and Analysis of School Mathematics, Grades K-12*. Conference Board of the Mathematical Sciences.



Speakers Trust

The Speak Out Challenge, delivered by Speakers Trust, is a public speaking programme aimed at enhancing young people's confidence, skills, empathy, and aspirations. Young people in Year 10 participate in a transformative full day workshop at their school, culminating in every student making a speech, without notes, on a topic of their choice. Selected students then participate in a competition, sharing their speeches with a wider audience in school and across their region in the Speak Out Challenge Final. At the Final, speeches are heard by a public audience and judged by a panel of VIP judges.

The programme uses the Universal Framework to systematically develop students' Speaking and Listening skills. Throughout the day, the workshop teaches students the mechanics of speaking, and what makes people listen. This involves teaching students how to develop a speech using the communication triangle (content, delivery and structure) and how to deliver a compelling speech through the Five Ss (stride, stand, smile, speak, stay).

The programme involves games, exercises, and opportunities for reflection of the students' Speaking and Listening skills using the Universal Framework. Feedback mechanisms, including pre and post-workshop surveys for students and teachers, enable Speakers Trust to measure impact and progress in essential skill development, linking classroom learning to real-world application of public speaking.

The Universal Framework 2.0 Handbook

The open-source Universal Framework 2.0 Handbook provides a meticulously detailed knowledge base for each of the 16 Speaking and Listening steps through "Core Ideas" and "Building Blocks" sections.⁴² For instance, Speaking Step 6, "Choosing language", explicitly details what appropriate language for a given setting means, why this choice is important, and practical guidance on how to select language suitable for the context and audience. Similarly, Listening Step 11, "Identifying influence", defines what influence entails in communication, explains why recognising it is critical for a listener, and outlines strategies for identifying and managing attempts at influence. See the Knowledge-base Annex for examples of the content that sits behind each step. This detailed content effectively provides a ready-made, comprehensive knowledge base for teachers and learners.

Teaching students *about* speaking and listening, rather than just *to* speak and *to* listen, is crucial for developing their agency and critical language awareness. This deeper understanding allows them to make more conscious, strategic choices in their own communication and to more astutely analyse the communication of others. This includes the ability to identify persuasive techniques, recognise bias, or deconstruct flawed arguments. Such abilities are vital in the context of media literacy and online misinformation.

The *We Need to Talk* report highlights the importance of students learning about "listeners' perceptions and considering how race, class, and other speaker characteristics influence what we hear and why".⁴³ This directly connects to advanced Listening steps within the Universal Framework, such as Step 11 "Identifying influence: I recognise when someone is trying to influence me" and Step 14 "Investigating bias: I analyse where bias is shown". The broader significance is that a comprehensive knowledge base about communication fosters not only skilled speakers and listeners but also more critical thinkers and discerning citizens, which is increasingly vital in the modern, complex information landscape.

⁴² Skills Builder Partnership (2025). HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS Teaching and assessing essential skills.

⁴³ *ibid*

Policy Recommendation 2

The National Curriculum must:

- Be revised to explicitly mandate the teaching *about* the physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social-emotional dimensions of Speaking and Listening.
- Be accompanied by guidance for all subjects to integrate age- and stage- appropriate explicit teaching of relevant communicative knowledge (e.g., disciplinary discourse in science, constructing historical arguments, explaining mathematical reasoning, debating ethical issues in PSHE).
- Have reference to a comprehensive knowledge-base that sits behind the different components of speaking and listening.

3.3. Drawing on international best practice

Rationale

The pursuit of a world-class Speaking and Listening curriculum in England can be significantly enriched by drawing upon insights and successful models from international education systems. Many countries have already recognised the importance of oracy or communication skills and have embedded them robustly within their national curricula or educational frameworks, offering valuable lessons in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment.

Illustrative research base

Pullen, C., Boylan, M., Boodt, S., Zhu, H. & Clarkson, L. (2024) Generic skills in the 14-19 curriculum: an international review. Summary report, Sheffield Hallam University

- This report, produced by the Centre for Education Systems at Sheffield Hallam University, presents a comparative review of how "generic" (or essential) skills like speaking and listening are included in the 14-19 curriculum. The study was commissioned to inform education policy in England by examining approaches in nine other jurisdictions: China, Estonia, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Ontario (Canada), Scotland, and Singapore.
- Most jurisdictions make generic skills compulsory for all learners in the 14-19 age group. England is an outlier, as generic skills are formally included only for learners aged 16-19 on vocational programmes. In most jurisdictions, generic skills are embedded or integrated within the main academic and vocational curriculum.
- Project-based learning is a key method for teaching generic skills, particularly in vocational contexts. While projects are part of education for all learners in most jurisdictions, they are sometimes less prominent in academic learning at the 14-19 stage.
- International comparison highlights the importance of coherence across the economic, social, and cultural context as well as in the education system.

Ravenscroft, T., Craig, R., & Stewart, G. (2025). Universal Framework 2.0: Final Report.

- This research used Large Language Models to undertake the world's first and most thorough analysis of international skills frameworks, such as Entrecomp, the Australian Core Skills Framework and SkillsFuture Singapore Critical Core Skills. These frameworks include communication skills and often underpin how oracy is taught.
- The analysis revealed the relevance, completeness and duplication of each framework, relative to other frameworks.

Learning from other policies

- England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (1998-2011)
 - Introduced with the ambition of driving up standards, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies prescribed a specific pedagogical framework for every primary school in England. They produced initial gains in national test scores, but are seen by many as a policy that lost momentum and ultimately failed to deliver long-term, world-class outcomes due to rigid, top-down, and inward-looking nature.
 - As PISA results began to be published, England was outperformed by jurisdictions with very different, often more flexible and teacher-led, approaches.⁴⁴ Academics criticised the NLNS as a tool that was "disconnected from, and indeed antithetical to, a huge weight of national and international evidence about how children learn", and which prevented the system from adapting and learning from more successful international models.⁴⁵⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Grek, S. (2009). Governing by numbers: The PISA 'effect' in Europe. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(1), 23-37.

⁴⁵ Alexander, R. (Ed.). (2010). *Children, their World, their Education: Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. Routledge.

⁴⁶ Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.

International Examples of Good Practice

- **Australia:** The Australian Curriculum features "Literacy" as one of its seven general capabilities. This capability explicitly encompasses "Speaking and Listening," with detailed learning continuums that outline expected progression from Foundation (Year 1) to Year 10. These continuums specify skills in areas such as interacting with others, interpreting, and creating spoken texts.
- **Singapore:** Singapore's Ministry of Education emphasises the development of "21st Century Competencies," which are integrated across the curriculum. "Communication, Collaboration and Information Skills" form a key component. The English Language Syllabus 2020, for instance, details learning outcomes for "Listening and Viewing" and "Speaking and Representing," focusing on critical listening, confident and sensitive speaking, and adapting communication to purpose, audience, context, and culture. Pedagogical principles such as "Learning-focused Interaction" and "Spiral Progression" guide the teaching of these skills.⁴⁷
- **Canada (Ontario):** The Ontario Language Curriculum (Elementary and Secondary) includes a dedicated "Oral Communication" strand. This strand outlines specific expectations for students in developing listening skills (e.g., to understand, learn, and critically evaluate), speaking skills (e.g., to communicate information and ideas, to interact), and using non-verbal cues effectively in a variety of formal and informal contexts, for diverse purposes and audiences.⁴⁸
- **Finland:** Finland teaches "oracy" in an integrated way through its national core curriculum, which places strong emphasis on transversal competencies, dialogic learning environments, and active student participation. These pedagogical approaches inherently foster the development of communication, interaction, and critical thinking skills across all areas of learning, promoting a culture where speaking and listening are integral to the educational process.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ www.moe.gov.sg, accessed on June 4, 2025,

[https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/secondary/syllabuses/eng/sec_exp-na_els-2020_syllabus-\(1\).pdf](https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/secondary/syllabuses/eng/sec_exp-na_els-2020_syllabus-(1).pdf)

⁴⁸ See, for example:

<https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/curriculum/secondary-english/courses/enl1w/course-intro>

⁴⁹ Lähdemäki (2019). Case Study: The Finnish National Curriculum 2016—A Co-created National Education Policy

A consistent UK skills taxonomy

The development of the open-source Universal Framework 2.0 was informed by a rigorous process of international benchmarking. This involved a comprehensive comparison with six leading international frameworks, which include speaking and listening (such as the Australian Core Skills Framework and the Skills Future Singapore Critical Core Skills Framework). The analysis used advanced analytical techniques such as Large Language Models in order to match each step in each framework to each step in every other framework based on semantic similarity.

This comparative analysis informed the design of version 2.0 of the Universal Framework. This ensured that it is not only comprehensive in its coverage of essential communication skills but also relevant to global standards of excellence. This work led to a combined metric of “skill density” evaluating completeness (coverage of elements found in all other frameworks) and relevance (pertinence of its content), in which Universal Framework 2.0 scored more highly than the international comparators.⁵⁰ Research conducted through the Universal Framework Review 2025 provides insight into comprehensive and relevant components of speaking and listening in this global context alongside other essential skills.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ravenscroft, Craig & Stewart. (2025). Universal Framework 2.0: Final Report.

⁵¹ *ibid*

Framework	Relative completeness	Relative relevance	Combined Score
Universal Framework 2.0	59	73	66
Entrecomp framework	50	68	59
O*Net	45	67	56
YMCA George Williams Framework	34	74	54
Australian Core Skills Framework	65	41	53
Meta Skills framework	64	33	49
SkillsFuture Singapore Critical Core Skills	67	22	45

Figure 5: Quantitative comparison of UK and international frameworks that include speaking and listening, using semantic similarity to map all skill steps to all other skill steps in each framework to provide the volume and quality of matches

Policy Recommendation 3

The DfE should:

- Develop guidance that is explicitly informed by the best available research.

3.4. Robust and varied assessment methods

Rationale

Assessment is a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning, providing crucial information about student progress, informing instructional adjustments, and ensuring accountability. For dynamic and multifaceted skills like Speaking and Listening, assessment methods must be robust, varied, and, most importantly, serve to enhance learning rather than merely generating grades for high-stakes reporting.

Illustrative research base

Black, P., & William, D. (1998). Assessment and Classroom Learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7-74.

- Highly influential review of assessment research. After synthesising over 250 studies, the authors provided conclusive evidence that improving "formative assessment" (the day-to-day process of gathering evidence to adapt teaching and learning) produces significant and often substantial learning gains.
- They argued that policy often overemphasises summative assessment (for grading and accountability), which can be detrimental to learning. This paper provided the catalyst for a global policy shift towards promoting "Assessment for Learning" (AfL).

Knight, S. (2019). Towards a 're-professionalised' teaching profession in England? The case of primary school assessment. *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(7), 848-861.

- This paper examines the impact of the removal of national curriculum levels and the introduction of a new assessment policy in English primary schools. It argues this policy shift created an opportunity for teachers to reclaim their professional judgement in assessment. It also highlights the challenges, including a lack of clear guidance and the lingering pressures of accountability.
- The research makes a case for policies that genuinely trust and invest in teachers' assessment literacy, allowing them to build robust and varied classroom-based assessment systems that serve learning.

Wyse, D., & Vitello, S. (2021). The Case for a New Approach to National Assessment in England. *The Curriculum Journal*, 32(3), 520-539.

- This paper presents a powerful critique of England's current high-stakes, test-dominated assessment system. It argues that the system narrows the curriculum, negatively impacts student wellbeing, and provides limited useful information for improving learning.
- The authors call for a new policy approach that prioritises a wider range of assessment methods, including a greater role for structured and moderated teacher assessment, to create a more valid, equitable, and educationally beneficial system.

Learning from other policies

- GCSE Speaking and Listening reform
 - Prior to 2013, Speaking and Listening was a formally assessed component of the GCSE in English, with teacher-assessed marks for tasks like presentations and group discussions contributing to a student's final grade. However there were concerns over its reliability for high-stakes summative purposes. The weighted grade was replaced with a separate, unweighted endorsement for speaking and listening (pass, merit, or distinction).⁵²
 - By reducing assessment to a single, unweighted endorsement, the policy removed the incentive for teachers to engage in the rich, varied, and ongoing formative assessment that is essential for developing complex communication skills. Effective formative assessment is seen as key to improving student learning, while the policy pushed practice in the opposite direction.⁵³
- 14-19 Diplomas in England
 - Introduced in 2008 and was retired within a few years. The policy's failure was significantly attributed to an overly complex and flawed assessment regime.
 - A comprehensive evaluation found that the assessment system was "over-engineered and over-complex," creating a bureaucratic burden and failing to provide a clear sense of students' abilities to employers and universities. The lack

⁵² Ofqual. (2013). GCSE Reform Consultation, May 2013.

⁵³ William, D. (2011). Embedded Formative Assessment. Solution Tree Press.

of a clear, trusted assessment model was seen as a key factor in its low uptake and eventual demise.⁵⁴

A balanced approach to assessment

- **Prioritising formative assessment:** Formative assessment should be the primary approach to monitoring and supporting the development of Speaking and Listening skills. This involves a range of ongoing strategies such as direct teacher observation of students during discussions and presentations, targeted questioning to probe understanding, structured peer and self-assessment activities and the provision of specific, actionable feedback designed to guide improvement. The Oracy Education Commission noted: “Most teachers lack tools for the diagnostic, supportive and formative assessment of oracy”⁵⁵ while the *We Need to Talk* report strongly advocates for the “provision of diagnostic and formative assessment tools and strategies to support teachers in understanding student progress”.⁵⁶
- **Developing authentic summative assessment:** While formative assessment is key, summative assessment also has a role in recognising students' proficiency at key milestones. However, for Speaking and Listening, these should move beyond traditional written tests. Authentic, multimodal summative assessments could include assessed presentations, structured academic debates, participation in group problem-solving tasks, or the compilation of digital portfolios showcasing a range of oral communication evidence. It is important to heed the caution from the *We Need to Talk* report regarding an over-reliance on narrow, high-stakes summative tests, which can have a reductive effect on teaching and learning.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Hodgson, A., & Spours, K. (2014). The English 14-19 education and training system: a new phase of radical and contested reform. *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(1), 16-33.

⁵⁵ *We Need to Talk: The report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England*, 2024

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ *ibid*

The Universal Framework

Clear, progressive standards, such as those set out in the open-source Universal Framework 2.0, provide the essential architecture for consistent, meaningful, and reliable assessment of Speaking and Listening. The Framework's defined steps and associated observable behaviors serve as explicit criteria against which student performance can be gauged. The Universal Framework 2.0 Handbook further supports this by offering specific assessment suggestions for each skill step, including reflective questions for students, observation cues for teachers, and examples of evidence types that can be collected. This detailed guidance supports both formative classroom-based assessment and the development of more formal summative tasks.

The relationship between a clear framework and effective assessment is symbiotic. An approach like the Universal Framework 2.0 provides the "what" to assess – the specific, progressive skills and their constituent components. Well-designed assessment practices, particularly those that are formative and diagnostic, provide the "how" – the methods and tools to gather evidence of learning against these defined skills.

Without a clear framework, assessment of complex skills like Speaking and Listening can become subjective, inconsistent, and difficult to moderate. Conversely, when assessment is tightly aligned with a progressive framework, it makes skill development visible, highlights areas for improvement, and reinforces the value of these competencies, thereby guiding instruction and motivating learners.

Existing assessment: certification

Modern Foreign Language GCSEs or the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, offer examples of how Speaking and Listening skills can be summatively assessed.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Skills Builder Partnership. (2024). Essential Skills at Scale.

TalkTheTalk

CONFIDENT COMMUNICATION FOR LIFE

Talk the Talk

Talk the Talk, a charity focused on oracy development, provides a range of practical workshops delivered by professional experts and qualified teachers. Their "Talk About Communication" programme is an engaging oracy workshop designed for students in Years 7-13.

The workshop teaches and develops the use of structure in presentations, essay writing, and exam answers. Students learn to identify and use persuasive language techniques to effectively convey their message, preparing them for English Speaking and Listening assessments. These full-day sessions offer each student at least three opportunities to speak in front of their peers, while simultaneously learning about visual, vocal, and verbal communication. The Speaking and Listening skills that students develop are transferable across all curriculum subjects.

Students use their new knowledge on visual, vocal and verbal communication to provide peer feedback following activities during the day. Students also self-assess their Speaking and Listening skills at the beginning and end of the workshop, and teachers provide feedback following activities, enabling learners to reflect on their progress and plan for continued skill building.

Policy Recommendation 4

The DfE should champion a balanced and purposeful assessment strategy for Speaking and Listening. This strategy must:

- Prioritise the development and dissemination of high-quality diagnostic and formative assessment tools and resources, aligned with a nationally recognised progressive framework, to support teachers in effectively monitoring student progress and tailoring instruction.

- Initiate a review and reform of existing qualifications, notably GCSE English Language, to ensure they incorporate more authentic, robust, and appropriately weighted assessment of Speaking and Listening skills.
- Actively explore and pilot innovative, multimodal summative assessment methods (e.g., performance-based tasks, digital learner profiles, structured oral examinations) that can capture the breadth and depth of students' Speaking and Listening abilities, potentially leading to new forms of recognition or qualification components.

3.5. High-quality teacher training and development

Rationale

The successful implementation of a high-standards Speaking and Listening curriculum hinges on the expertise and confidence of teachers. Educators require specific, high-quality training and ongoing professional development in oracy pedagogy. This includes understanding how to teach Speaking and Listening skills explicitly, how to create and manage talk-rich classroom environments, how to integrate oracy effectively within their specific subject disciplines, and how to assess student progress meaningfully. Leading organisations like Speech and Language UK advocate for all learners “to be able to learn and participate, no matter how they communicate”⁵⁹ - a fundamental part of high quality teaching is the teacher’s ability to adapt teaching to learners’ specific Speaking, Listening and communication needs.

Illustrative research base

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1).

- This was considered a landmark paper that solidified the link between teacher quality and student outcomes at a policy level. Darling-Hammond reviewed state-level data in the US and found that teacher expertise - as measured by factors like content

⁵⁹ Our policy campaigns- Speech and Language UK, accessed on August 10, 2025
<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/the-issue/our-policy-campaigns/>

knowledge, certification status, and experience - was the single most important school-related factor influencing student achievement.

- The paper argues powerfully that education policies that invest in rigorous teacher preparation, licensing, and professional development are the most effective way to improve education systems.

Kennedy, M. M. (2016). How Does Professional Development Improve Teaching? *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 945-980.

- This review examines the mechanisms through which professional development actually leads to better teaching. Kennedy identifies several key pathways, including building teachers' content knowledge, providing them with specific pedagogical practices (like how to lead a debate), and changing their beliefs.
- The paper concludes that effective Professional Development policy must be multifaceted, providing teachers not just with new techniques but also with the deep subject and pedagogical knowledge required to use them wisely.

Learning from other policies

- Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)
 - A critique from academics is that teachers were handed a complex educational philosophy without the practical training needed to translate its abstract principles (like "successful learners") into concrete classroom practice.⁶⁰
 - The OECD's review of CfE found that professional development in Scotland was highly variable and often disconnected from the curriculum's core goals. The report noted that while teachers were committed to CfE's vision, they had not received consistent support to develop the new teaching strategies required, hindering the policy's potential.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Priestley, M., & Humes, W. (2010). The Development of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: amnesia and déjà vu. *Oxford Review of Education*, 36(3), 345-361.

⁶¹ OECD (2021). *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Essential components of teacher training and development

- **Understanding language development:** Teachers need a foundational understanding of speech, language, and communication development, as well as strategies to identify and support students with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).
- **Dialogic teaching and classroom talk:** Training should equip teachers with a repertoire of dialogic teaching methods to foster high-quality classroom talk, encourage student participation, and use talk to deepen learning across subjects. This includes strategies for structuring discussions, asking effective questions, and facilitating exploratory talk.
- **Explicit skill instruction:** Teachers must be trained in how to explicitly teach the various components of Speaking and Listening – the physical and linguistic alongside how they link to other essential skills – as outlined in a progressive framework.⁶²
- **Formative assessment and feedback:** Professional development should focus on practical techniques for formatively assessing Speaking and Listening skills and providing constructive, specific feedback that helps students improve.
- **Subject-specific application:** Training should address how speaking and listening can be leveraged to enhance learning within specific subject disciplines, helping teachers to develop students' abilities to use the distinctive discourses and communicative practices of their subjects (e.g., scientific explanation, historical debate, mathematical reasoning).⁶³
- **Supporting EAL learners:** Given the diversity in classrooms, teachers also need strategies to effectively support EAL learners in developing their English speaking and listening skills while valuing their existing linguistic resources.

The role of pedagogical principles and resources

A clear set of pedagogical principles can guide effective teacher training. There are elements of pedagogy that ensure effective implementation across schools and colleges:

⁶² Explicit Instruction as the Essential Tool for Executing the Science of Reading - PMC, accessed on June 4, 2025, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9004595/>

⁶³ *ibid*

1. Keep it simple. Use a consistent framework and a common language to build awareness and a whole-school approach.
2. Start early and keep going. Start in early years and continue with the same approach throughout formal education.
3. Measure it. Ongoing formative assessment.
4. Teach directly. Explicit teaching of speaking and listening skills.
5. Keep practising. Maximise opportunities for learners to develop and practice their speaking and listening skills across the curriculum.
6. Bring it to life. Real-world, applied learning.

Resources such as the Universal Framework 2.0 Handbook offer teachers detailed content and teaching ideas for each specific skill step, serving as a valuable tool for planning and instruction.

The Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP)

The Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP) was a government-funded initiative designed to enhance the skills of early years practitioners. The programme used a blended learning model, combining online self-study e-learning units with facilitated webinars led by expert trainers in speech, language and communication - Speech and Language UK. This model allowed practitioners to learn at their own pace while still benefiting from live, interactive support.

Over an eight-month period, practitioners completed modules on communication and language, early mathematics and personal, social, and emotional development. An independent evaluation of phase three found that the programme “contributed to perceptions of improvements in staff knowledge and understanding, practice and confidence” and that at the time of the evaluation, application of learning was perceived to show benefits for children.⁶⁴

Policy Recommendation 5

The DfE must:

- Ensure that comprehensive training in the theory and practice of teaching Speaking and Listening is a core, mandatory component of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and the Early Career Framework (ECF).
- Ensure that early years workers have the training they need to support children facing speech and language challenges through investing in training and support.
- Develop a national strategy for high-quality, funded, and accessible Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in oracy must be established. This should include the development of clear pathways for teachers to become specialist Oracy Leaders or Skills Leaders within their schools and trusts, capable of driving improvement and supporting colleagues.

⁶⁴ Department for Education, *Early Years Professional Development Programme: evaluation report*, July 2025, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/686bda4c2557debd867cbd83/EYPDP3_evaluation_report-03.07.25.pdf

3.6. Explicit teaching and structured practice

Rationale

The development of proficiency in Speaking and Listening, much like literacy and numeracy, is significantly enhanced through explicit instruction where skills are directly taught, modelled, and deconstructed, combined with regular and purposeful opportunities for students to practise these skills in a variety of meaningful contexts. Hoping that these complex skills will be acquired incidentally is insufficient to meet high standards.

Illustrative research base

Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance. *Psychological Review*, 100(3), 363–406.

- This paper introduced the concept of "deliberate practice." Ericsson and his colleagues show that expertise is not built through mindless repetition but through structured, purposeful practice designed to improve specific aspects of performance with opportunities for feedback and refinement.
- This directly refutes the idea that skills are acquired incidentally. For a policy on speaking and listening, this research is crucial: it implies that simply having more classroom talk is insufficient; students need structured opportunities to practise specific steps of speaking and listening (e.g. recognising tone or using facts) with teaching and feedback.

Webb, N. M. (2009). The teacher's role in promoting collaborative dialogue in the classroom. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 79(1), 1-28.

- Webb's research focuses on a specific speaking skill: giving detailed explanations. Her studies analyse what kind of teacher guidance is most effective. She found that simply telling students to "explain" is not enough.
- The most significant learning gains occur when teachers explicitly model what a good explanation looks like and provide specific prompts and structures for students to use in their group work.

Mercer, N., Wegerif, R., & Dawes, L. (1999). Children's talk and the development of reasoning in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(1), 95-111.

- In this foundational study researchers explicitly taught primary school children the "ground rules" for "Exploratory Talk" - a specific type of productive dialogue where reasons are expected and alternatives are challenged respectfully.
- They found that after the intervention, students showed significant gains on non-verbal reasoning tests and demonstrated more effective group reasoning in science tasks compared to control groups.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge.

- Hattie's extensive research is one of the largest evidence-based studies in education. A key finding is that "teacher clarity" has one of the most significant effects on student achievement. This involves clearly communicating the intentions of the lesson and the criteria for success.

Pressley, M., & Harris, K. R. (2006). Cognitive Strategies Instruction: From Basic Research to Classroom Instruction. In P. A. Alexander & P. H. Winne (Eds.), *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 265–286).

- This chapter reviews the extensive research on teaching cognitive strategies (e.g. how to summarise, how to ask good questions).
- The authors conclude that effective instruction in these skills is explicit and direct. The teacher models the strategy, explains why it is useful, guides students in using it, and provides feedback.
- This directly applies to oracy, suggesting that skills like "active listening" or "speaking engagingly" should be explicitly taught as cognitive strategies, not just expected to occur naturally.

Learning from other policies

- Discovery Learning in North America
 - In this model, students were expected to discover fundamental principles for themselves with minimal guidance from a teacher.
 - Research found that direct, explicit instruction is consistently more effective for novice learners.⁶⁵
 - The models that produced the best results in basic skills, problem-solving, and self-esteem were those based on Direct Instruction, which emphasised carefully sequenced lessons and explicit teaching.⁶⁶
- Unstructured Inquiry-Based Science Education
 - The policy often expected students to discover complex scientific principles (e.g. laws of physics, chemical interactions) from experiments without first receiving explicit instruction in the foundational knowledge, vocabulary, and procedures needed to make sense of their observations.
 - A review of research in science education found that inquiry-based approaches are only successful when they include explicit guidance and structured components, such as the direct teaching of experimental variables.⁶⁷⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Kirschner, P. A., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. E. (2006). Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(2), 75-86.

⁶⁶ Watkins, C. L., & Slocum, T. A. (2004). The Components of Direct Instruction. In D. J. Moran & R. W. Malott (Eds.), *Evidence-based educational methods* (pp. 28-79). Elsevier Academic Press.

⁶⁷ Furtak, E. M., Seidel, T., Iverson, H., & Briggs, D. C. (2012). Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Studies of Inquiry-Based Science Teaching: A Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(3), 300–329.

⁶⁸ Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (2016). *Why Knowledge Matters: Rescuing Our Children from Failed Educational Theories*. Harvard Education Press.

Implementation in the Curriculum

- **Explicit teaching of skills:** The curriculum should ensure that dedicated time is allocated for the explicit teaching of the specific components of Speaking and Listening. This involves breaking down these complex skills into manageable steps and providing direct instruction on how to perform them effectively.
- **Embedded practice across subjects:** Beyond discrete instruction, opportunities for students to apply and refine their Speaking and Listening skills must be systematically and thoughtfully embedded across all subject areas. This requires teachers in every discipline to be equipped to design learning activities that necessitate purposeful talk, collaborative discussion, reasoned debate, and clear presentations relevant to their subject content. For example, students might engage in a historical inquiry through structured debate, explain a scientific concept to peers, or present mathematical solutions and reasoning.
- **Extracurricular reinforcement:** Enrichment activities provide invaluable platforms for students to further practise, apply, and extend their Speaking and Listening skills in authentic and often highly motivating contexts. Activities such as sports, debate clubs, employability programmes and school councils offer rich environments for skill development.

Examples of best practice

The Universal Framework

An open-source, granular approach like the Universal Framework 2.0, which breaks down Speaking and Listening into 16 distinct, teachable steps per skill, provides a clear roadmap for explicit instruction by defining specific learning objectives. The pedagogical Principles of "Focus Tightly", "Keep practising", and "Bring it to life" collectively underscore the pedagogical approach of combining focused instruction with frequent, and varied application.



Voice 21

Voice 21 is the UK's national oracy education charity. They exist to ensure that every child benefits from a high-quality oracy education. By working in partnership with schools, particularly those serving the most economically disadvantaged communities, Voice 21 helps embed oracy into teaching and learning, the curriculum, and wider school life, so that every child learns how to use their voice to thrive in school, work and life.

At the heart of Voice 21's approach is the Oracy Framework, developed in partnership with Oracy Cambridge. The Framework breaks oracy down into four distinct but interrelated strands: physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social & emotional. It enables teachers to isolate and teach the skills required for effective speaking, listening and communication in different contexts and provides a shared language for teachers and students to discuss and reflect on oracy in the classroom.

Voice 21 has also developed the Oracy Benchmarks, which define what high-quality oracy education looks like in individual classrooms and across whole schools. These benchmarks guide educators to explicitly teach oracy, provide regular opportunities for students to practise their skills across the curriculum and foster a school culture where every child's voice is valued and heard.



Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation

The "Play in a Day" workshop guides learners to take a Shakespearean play from text to performance, while explicitly focuses on building KS2 and KS3 learner's speaking, listening, creativity and teamwork skills.

Throughout the day, facilitators consistently refer to Speaking, Listening, Creativity and Teamwork skills, displaying them as posters throughout the room for visual reinforcement. Facilitators define and explain which essential skills steps learners will be developing before activities, specifying what step of these skills learners are developing: Speaking step 7 "Expressing self" and Listening step 7 "Active Listening".

Students are guided to not only practice these skills but also to reflect on their development regularly. Facilitators prompt students to identify what they've learned and what skills they've developed throughout the day and at the end of day plenary.

Before the final performance, students are empowered to speak to the audience about the skills they have worked on and reflect on their progress. This approach ensures that participants are not only acting out a play, but are also actively building their Speaking skills, preparing them for future success both in and out of the classroom.



The Economist Educational Foundation

The Economist Educational Foundation's flagship programme, Topical Talk, is designed to integrate current affairs into classroom discussions, fostering critical thinking and media literacy among students. The programme encourages learners to explore multiple perspectives and form informed opinions.

A core component of Topical Talk's methodology involves the explicit development of essential skills, including Speaking and Listening utilising the Universal Framework. Speaking and Listening skills are not just supplementary; they are the fundamental mechanism through which students acquire complex knowledge, engage with multiple viewpoints and form balanced opinions.

For instance, discussions around sensitive topics like online misogyny, as facilitated by their "Andrew Tate: misogyny online" resource - one of their most downloaded last year - provide a practical context for students to hone their Speaking and Listening skills. The programme ensures that these discussions are structured to promote effective communication, where students learn to articulate their views clearly, listen actively to differing opinions, and engage respectfully in debate, thereby directly contributing to their media literacy and civic participation.

Policy Recommendation 6

Explicit teaching and structured practice should be achieved by one of the following means:

- The programmes of study for all subjects in the national curriculum should be revised to include explicit requirements for the development and application of Speaking and Listening skills relevant to that discipline.
- Statutory guidance should mandate dedicated curriculum time for explicit oracy skill instruction, particularly in the primary years and early secondary education, and should promote a whole-school approach to providing diverse and ample practice opportunities, both within and beyond timetabled lessons.
- Non-statutory guidance for schools on implementing Speaking and Listening effectively within the national curriculum.

3.7. Inclusivity and equity

Rationale

A fundamental tenet of high standards in education is ensuring that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, any Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), or their status as learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL), have equitable access to, and can fully benefit from, high-quality Speaking and Listening education. Oracy education must be designed and delivered in ways that affirm diversity and actively dismantle barriers to participation and achievement.

One of the reasons that high standards have received so much attention in the English education system over the last two decades is the belief that every child should be given the opportunity to achieve, no matter their background. Introduction of oracy into the national curriculum without corresponding high standards risks widening social mobility.

Further, policy should be sensitive to the concerns that oracy can be delivered as a deficit-based model.⁶⁹ Academic critiques argue that the oracy movement often conflates functional communication skills with a particular, culturally-dominant performance of "articulacy." This performance (often associated with formal debate, presentational styles, and specific middle-class norms) is held up as the standard for success. Their concern is it risks devaluing other valid communication styles and dialects, framing them as a deficit to be overcome.

⁶⁹ Cushing, I. (2024). Social in/justice and the deficit foundations of oracy

Illustrative research base

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2006). *Improving Schools, Developing Inclusion*. Routledge.

- This book, based on UK research, re-frames inclusion not as a separate policy for certain students (e.g., those with disabilities), but as a principle for reforming the entire education system.
- The authors argue that policies focused on raising standards often lead to exclusion unless there is a simultaneous, explicit focus on the values of equity, participation, and respect for diversity. They provide evidence that inclusive policies, which actively identify and remove barriers to learning for all students, are central to creating genuinely effective schools.

Mercer, N. (2008). The seeds of time: Why classroom dialogue needs a temporal analysis. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 17(1), 33-59.

- Mercer argues here that for classroom dialogue to be truly inclusive, it must be seen as a long-term process of building shared understanding. He critiques approaches that focus only on short-term talk.
- For equity, this is crucial: it implies that policies must support sustained pedagogies that give all students, including shy or less confident speakers, the time and structured support needed to become full members of the classroom's "community of enquiry," rather than rewarding only the quickest and most assertive talkers.

Snell, J., & Lefstein, A. (2018). 'You have to have a debate': Empowering and disempowering talk in a primary school classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(2), 277-298.

- This UK-based study shows that simply implementing "dialogic" or debate-based activities does not automatically lead to equity. The researchers observed that even in a classroom focused on talk, some children were empowered while others were marginalised based on their social status and communication styles.
- The paper is a crucial argument for policies that ensure teacher training in oracy goes beyond just the techniques and includes a deep focus on facilitation skills that ensure equitable participation and challenge social hierarchies.

Learning from other policies

- Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)
 - Research published in the British Educational Research Journal has suggested that the lack of structure in CfE may have disadvantaged students from poorer backgrounds, who benefit most from a clearly sequenced, knowledge-rich curriculum. The vagueness of the framework may inadvertently widen the very attainment gap it was designed to close.⁷⁰
- The 'No Child Left Behind' Act (USA)
 - Introduced in 2002 with the laudable goal of closing the achievement gap, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is one of the most-cited examples of a well-intentioned policy failing due to its inequitable impact.
 - The focus on a single test was found to be detrimental for students with disabilities and English language learners, for whom the assessment was often inappropriate.

71 72

Inclusive pedagogical strategies

Achieving inclusivity and equity in Speaking and Listening education requires:

- **Teacher training in inclusive oracy:** Equipping all teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement inclusive oracy pedagogies, including differentiating instruction, providing tailored support for students with SEND, and creating universally designed learning environments.
- **Valuing linguistic diversity:** Recognising and valuing students' diverse linguistic repertoires, including their home languages and dialects, as assets in the learning process. For EAL learners, this means employing strategies that leverage their multilingualism to support the development of English oracy.⁷³

⁷⁰ Young, M., & Muller, J. (2010). Three Educational Scenarios for the Future: lessons from the sociology of knowledge. *European Journal of Education*, 45(1), 11-27.

⁷¹ National Research Council. (2011). *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education*. The National Academies Press.

⁷² Figlio, D. N., & Loeb, S. (2011). School Accountability. In *Handbook of the Economics of Education* (Vol. 3, pp. 383-421). Elsevier.

⁷³ Oracy in the curriculum –what is the current state of play? - Voice 21, accessed on June 4, 2025, <https://voice21.org/oracy-in-the-curriculum/>

- **Creating safe and supportive learning environments:** Fostering classroom cultures where all students feel safe, respected, and confident to contribute their voices, take risks in their communication, and learn from mistakes without fear of negative judgment.⁷⁴
- **Using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** Ensuring that students who use AAC methods have their communicative contributions fully integrated and valued within classroom interactions and oracy activities. The definition of speaking and listening must be expansive enough to include all forms of communication.

Examples of best practice

**Speech and
Language UK**



Changing young lives.

Speech and Language UK

Speech and Language UK works to give every child the skills they need to face the future with confidence. They design innovative tools and training for thousands of nursery assistants and teachers to use in their classrooms and run two special schools for children with complex speech and language challenges. They have developed the highly successful Talk Boost programme, which is a targeted intervention aimed at children who struggle with talking and understanding words, and helps them to boost their language skills. A key offering is their free online course, Introduction to speech, language and communication. This course introduces educators to how they can support children's speech, language and communication skills, explaining why this is crucial for their learning and wellbeing, and teaching them how to identify children who may need extra support.

The charity also offers a wealth of resources on their website. This includes guidance on specific conditions like Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), to tips for supporting children learning multiple languages. To help educators pinpoint students with speech and language challenges, they provide a list of signs to look out for,

⁷⁴ The Principles of Establishing Effective Oracy Practice - One Education, accessed on June 4, 2025, <https://www.oneeducation.co.uk/the-principles-of-establishing-effective-oracy-practice/>

such as difficulty understanding spoken language, struggles with expressive language, or problems with social skills. They also have a Learning Centre, which is a subscription-based digital hub packed with resources and online courses educators can access on demand. These resources empower school staff to deliver targeted support and foster an inclusive environment where every child can thrive.

The Universal Framework

The open-source Universal Framework is designed with flexibility and adaptability at its core, enabling inclusive Speaking and Listening education. Its granular structure, with 16 steps and underlying building blocks for each skill, allows for precise differentiation to meet individual learner needs. The Universal Framework is applicable for non-verbal modes of communication, ensuring its applicability to students who are deaf or non-verbal.

The Expanded Version of Universal Framework offers more increments between steps, specifically caters to learners who may require smaller, more scaffolded steps to progress. This - along with the framework itself - has been extensively tested and used in specialist settings. The applicability for SEND learners is evidenced by the widespread adoption in these settings.

The consistent and coherent application of a robust, progressive approach like the Universal Framework across all the discussed criteria - clear expectations, comprehensive knowledge, varied assessment, high-quality teacher training, explicit instruction, and inclusivity - is the cornerstone for achieving systemic and sustainable improvement in Speaking and Listening education nationwide. This Framework serves not merely as a tool for one specific aspect but as the fundamental architecture that connects and aligns all essential elements of a high-standards approach. It acts as the "golden thread" capable of weaving these components into a cohesive and impactful whole. This systemic integration is crucial for moving beyond the current "patchy and inconsistent" provision of oracy education towards a system that offers unifying, evidence-based structure, thereby driving consistent quality and equitable outcomes for every student.

Discrete, functional components (or steps) of speaking and listening skills ensure that they do not propagate a deficit-model. For example, "Using facts" (Speaking Step 8) or "Recognising tone" (Listening Step 10) is less prescriptive or value-laden than a model that promotes a holistic style of "good talk." The flexibility in how and where they are applied is vital and can only come from being fully informed by language in different contexts (education, enrichment, employment and wider life).

Policy Recommendation 7

All national policies, guidance, and initiatives related to Speaking and Listening must embed a core and non-negotiable focus on equity and inclusion. This includes:

- Allocating ring-fenced funding for the development and provision of targeted support, resources, and interventions for disadvantaged students, students with SEND, and EAL learners to ensure they can fully access and benefit from oracy education.
- Mandating that all teacher training programmes (ITT, ECF, and CPD) comprehensively cover inclusive oracy pedagogies, differentiation strategies, and approaches for valuing linguistic diversity.
- Ensuring that all assessment methods for Speaking and Listening are designed and implemented in ways that are fair, accessible, culturally sensitive, and free from bias for all learners.
- Avoiding a deficit model by adopting an approach with a continuous, lifelong progression that normalises skill development as a part of every person's educational journey, not just for those deemed to be lacking.

3.8. Linking into employment, careers and other settings

Rationale

A curriculum that prepares learners for life and work must - by definition - link into employment. But the cross-cutting skills of speaking and listening must be built into the curriculum in a way that is coherent and complementary to enrichment settings, other essential skills and government approaches like the DfE's own UK Skills Classification.

Oracy skills must be built in such a way as to prepare young people for the world of work. This means drawing on decades of employer data and involving experts in the design of standards. Employment is where social mobility, productivity and economic growth happen. Failure to consider employers in the implementation of oracy in schools risks a policy that does nothing to solve the pressing issues of inclusive economic growth and social mobility.

Statutory careers provision is a vitally important part of education. The widely-commended Gatsby Benchmarks have helped drive standards and integration into the education system. The government's Careers and Enterprise Company has had many successes in embedding this careers provision. The potential positive impact of an oracy policy that interfaced with careers education is huge - unlocking young people's speaking and listening abilities in the context of interviews and at work.

Illustrative research base

Leitch, S. (2006). *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills*. HM Treasury.

- This landmark UK government review is a foundational policy document arguing that the nation's economic prosperity depends on a radical improvement in skills at all levels. Its core premise is that the skills demanded by employers must be driven into the heart of the UK's education and training system.
- The review's recommendations go far beyond careers advice, calling for a responsive curriculum policy where qualification frameworks and funding are directly shaped by employer demand, making the case for a systemic, not just supplemental, link.

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). (2014). *The Future of Work: Jobs and skills in 2030*.

- This report forecasts future economic trends and identifies the skills that will be in high demand. It consistently highlights the growing importance of higher-order cognitive skills (problem-solving, critical thinking) and social skills (communication, collaboration), which are not tied to any single subject.
- It argues that for the UK to remain competitive, the education system must adapt its curriculum to intentionally cultivate these skills, making a direct economic case for aligning what is taught in schools with labour market intelligence.

Dede, C. (2010). Comparing frameworks for “21st century skills”. In J. A. Bellanca & R. Brandt (Eds.), *21st century skills: Rethinking how students learn* (pp. 51-76). Solution Tree Press.

- Dede reviews and synthesises various international frameworks for “21st-century skills” (which include communication, collaboration, and critical thinking). He argues that these are not add-ons but are essential for success in modern workplaces and that teaching them requires new forms of curriculum and assessment.
- The paper makes a powerful case for a policy shift away from a curriculum solely focused on content knowledge towards one that explicitly integrates the teaching and assessment of these cross-cutting skills.

Heckman, J. J., & Kautz, T. (2012). *Hard evidence on soft skills*. *Labour economics*, 19(4), 451-464.

- Nobel laureate economist Heckman provides rigorous economic evidence for the importance of “soft skills” (which he calls character skills, including communication). He demonstrates that these skills are powerful predictors of life success, including employment outcomes and earnings, often more so than purely cognitive scores.
- This research provides a punchy economic rationale for policies that would invest in embedding the development of these skills into the curriculum from the earliest years.

Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2015). *The Knowledge Capital of Nations: Education and the Economics of Growth*. MIT Press.

- This landmark economic study analyses data from across the globe to demonstrate the powerful link between the skills of a population and national economic growth. The authors show that it's the quality of cognitive skills that drives productivity and prosperity.
- Their work provides the fundamental economic argument for why education policy must be concerned with developing high-level, applicable skills that are valued by the labour market.

Bocock, L., del Pozo Segura, JM. and Hillary, J. (2025) *Building foundations: The implications of childhood skill development for addressing future skills needs in England*. NFER.

- This 2025 report from NFER provides a critical analysis of the relationship between skills developed in childhood and England's future economic and employment needs. The paper argues that national skills policy often focuses on post-16 education and adult learning, while neglecting the crucial foundational stage of primary education.
- It recommends that the primary curriculum framework be revised to give more explicit value and teaching time to the development of speaking and listening, problem-solving, and teamwork. It also suggests that assessment and accountability measures should be broadened to recognise and incentivise the teaching of these skills.

Learning from other policies

The Youth Training Scheme (YTS) (UK, 1980s)

- Launched in 1983 to tackle soaring youth unemployment, YTS was a work-based training programme for 16- and 17-year-olds. While it engaged a huge number of young people, it was widely criticised for being a low-quality, supply-led scheme that was fundamentally disconnected from the actual skill needs of the economy
- Academic analysis from the era critiqued YTS for its failure to provide meaningful, high-quality training.⁷⁵ Research published in journals like the *British Journal of*

⁷⁵ Benn, C., & Fairley, J. (Eds.). (1986). *Challenging the MSC: On the Subversive of Education and Training*. Pluto Press. (MSC was the Manpower Services Commission, which ran YTS).

Education and Work highlighted the scheme's failure to engage employers in a meaningful way, contrasting it with the more successful, employer-led apprenticeship systems in countries like Germany.

The Introduction and Evolution of "Functional Skills" (England)

- "Functional Skills" qualifications in English, Maths, and ICT were introduced as a curriculum change to provide a practical, real-world alternative to traditional GCSEs, specifically designed to meet the needs of employers.
- It was reported that the qualifications were not always clearly understood by businesses. They were perceived as a less-valuable option for students who couldn't pass a GCSE. This lack of "parity of esteem" meant they did not function as a signal of competence as reliably as desired. The pathway from Functional Skills to further academic or technical education could lack clarity, making next steps for many learners more challenging.
- The Wolf Review of Vocational Education (2011) found that many qualifications did not provide meaningful routes to employment or further study.⁷⁶ Reports by the UK's education regulator, Ofsted, have repeatedly highlighted the challenge of delivering Functional Skills in a way that is valued by learners and employers, pointing to a persistent disconnect between the curriculum's intent and its reality.

Interoperability with Employment and Other Settings

- **Listen to employers.** Adopt an approach and guidance that has worked back from the oracy skills employers have identified they need in school-leavers. This means working with industry bodies including the CBI, IoD and CIPD, who all support the same structured approach to building speaking and listening skills.⁷⁷ Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) have also called for this very same approach to essential skills.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Wolf, A. (2011). Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report. UK Department for Education.

⁷⁷ See, for example, <https://www.iod.com/app/uploads/2024/12/Curriculum-and-assessment-review-IoD-response-a27c7a442d978d15613c0b54ed1b9df1.pdf>

⁷⁸ See, for example, https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-08/BLDN_Report_LSIP_DIGITAL%20FINAL%20compressed_0.pdf

- **Align with careers education.** Statutory guidance for careers education already includes using the Universal Framework for speaking, listening and the other essential skills.⁷⁹ The Careers and Enterprise Company has been driving adoption of the Universal Framework for speaking and listening skills, and it forms a core part of its Future Skills Questionnaire as well as EqualEx guidance.⁸⁰
- **Align with T-Level and Apprenticeship guidance.** The Universal Framework is recommended in both T-Level and Apprenticeship guidance for building essential skills including speaking and listening.⁸¹
- **Complement enrichment.** The DfE's research highlights the importance of enrichment for preparing young people for life and work. Essential skills like speaking and listening are often a core part of enrichment interventions, and so it is imperative that oracy policy complements this rather than confuses it.

Examples of best practice

The Universal Framework

The Universal Framework is used widely in primary, secondary, further and higher education to build essential skills including Speaking and Listening skills. It is used in oracy programmes like Talk the Talk, media literacy interventions like Topical Talk from the Economist Educational Foundation, sports programmes like Harlequins Rugby as well as hundreds of others. The approach is in statutory careers guidance, is championed by the government's Careers and Enterprise Company (in its leading Future Skills Questionnaire and EqualEx work experience guidance), it's in apprenticeship and T-Level guidance. It is used by businesses large and small, from

⁷⁹

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools/careers-guidance-and-access-for-education-and-training-providers>

⁸⁰

https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/equalex?_gl=1*18b9qav*_ga*OTc2NzM2ODYwLjE3NTAwODU5Mjc.*_ga_LR7HFCRMNM*cze3NTAwODU5MjYkbzEkZzEkdDE3NTAwODU5NzEkajE4JGwwwJGgw*_ga_QJ8NK3JQTJ*cze3NTAwODU5MjYkbzEkZzEkdDE3NTAwODU5NzEkajE4JGwwwJGgw*_ga_4P5JV66BW4*cze3NTAwODU5MjYkbzEkZzEkdDE3NTAwODU5NzIkajE3JGwwwJGgw

⁸¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eecbf40d3bf7f7fcbd37501/Student_guide_-_preparing_for_IP_June_2020_FINAL_version.pdf

Amazon and Amey to HS2 and Heathrow. The Universal Framework has wide applicability and is widely integrated across all of these contexts because of its comprehensiveness, relevance and interoperability.

Policy Recommendation 8

Oracy in the national curriculum should:

- Take an open-source approach that is compatible with the hundreds of charity organisations delivering speaking and listening programmes using the Universal Framework. It can therefore be a powerful tool to support enrichment.
- Not undermine the Gatsby Benchmarks or work of the Careers and Enterprise Company, which both support the learning of speaking and listening using the Universal Framework.
- Deliver on its Terms of Reference of preparing young people for work, by listening to employers.

3.9. Compatibility with other skills and taxonomies

Rationale

The national curriculum is part of a much wider system of education and learning. From sports and debating clubs to mentoring and career-readiness programmes, there is a whole web of provision that helps prepare young people for life and work. Speaking and Listening skills are core to so many of these and oracy policy should be carefully designed to be consistent and relevant to how skills are built in those settings.

Equally, the DfE and Skills England are responsible for a large number of qualifications, programmes and taxonomies that sit outside the national curriculum. There is a meaningful risk, that without due consideration, changes to the curriculum create further divergence, duplication and fragmentation within the education system - running counter to the government's aims.⁸²

Finally, oracy sits within a wider set of essential skills that predict life outcomes like income, social mobility and wellbeing. Education policy should therefore ensure that the skills can be built in a way that complements other essential skills in a way that is rigorous and drives high standards.

Illustrative research base

Ito, M., et al. (2013). *Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design*. Digital Media and Learning Research Hub.

- This report is foundational for understanding the importance of linking in-school, out-of-school, and peer-to-peer learning. It argues that learning is most effective when it is "connected" - when a young person's academic work connects with their personal interests and the opportunities available in their communities (like clubs or online groups).
- It provides a powerful rationale for why an oracy curriculum, for example, should be designed to be "translatable" and consistent with the communication skills being developed in a sports club or a youth mentoring programme, creating a virtuous circle of skill development.

⁸² See, for example, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d6713fd325db61c5ff287/Skills_England_priorities_2025_to_2026_-_02_June_2025.pdf

Akkerman, S. F., & Bakker, A. (2011). Boundary crossing and boundary objects. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 132-169.

- This highly-cited paper provides the theory of "Boundary crossing": the process of moving between different sites of practice (like school, a sports team, and a future workplace). The authors show that learning is enhanced when systems help individuals navigate these boundaries.
- This makes a compelling case for policies that intentionally create coherence between these different settings. For example, an oracy policy would be stronger if it used a skills language (a "boundary object") that is shared by teachers, enrichment, and employers.

Ananiadou, K., & Claro, M. (2009). *21st Century Skills and Competences for New Millennium Learners in OECD Countries*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 41.

- This OECD paper examines how education systems can integrate "21st-century skills" (like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking). The authors argue against teaching these skills in isolation, advocating for their integration across the curriculum.
- They make the case that for a skills policy to be effective, it must be part of a coherent framework where oracy, digital literacy, and problem-solving are seen as complementary and are taught and assessed in a joined-up way.

OECD (2015). *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*. OECD Publishing.

- Summary of Evidence: This major international report from the OECD examines how different countries align their systems of student assessment, teacher appraisal, and school evaluation. It finds that high-performing education systems create positive synergies between these different functions, using them to support improvement. It warns against systems where accountability (evaluation) is incompatible with learning, creating negative consequences like curriculum narrowing. This provides a strong, cross-national evidence base for the importance of ensuring all aspects of a country's education policy are coherent and working towards the same goals.

Learning from other policies

"Whole Language" vs. The Cognitive Model of Reading

- The "Whole Language" movement was a skills policy for reading that became dominant in many parts of the US in the 1980s and 90s. It was based on a pedagogical philosophy that learning to read is a natural process of discovery and immersion.
- This policy's pedagogy was incompatible with the evidence-based taxonomy of reading skills known as the "Simple View of Reading". This model, now the scientific consensus, posits that reading comprehension is the product of two distinct, equally essential skills: Decoding (sounding out words) and Linguistic Comprehension (understanding spoken language). The "Whole Language" pedagogy, by rejecting the explicit, systematic teaching of decoding (phonics), was trying to teach comprehension while being incompatible with the method required to teach one of its foundational components.
- The policy's failure is attributed to this incompatibility. As cognitive scientist Mark Seidenberg details in *Language at the Speed of Sight*, the policy was based on a flawed model of the reading skill itself.⁸³ The National Reading Panel report confirmed that pedagogy for early reading must include explicit and systematic phonics, demonstrating that the "holistic" pedagogy of Whole Language was incompatible with the component-skill reality of learning to read.⁸⁴

Compatibility with other skills and taxonomies

- **Align with other government policies and approaches.** The government is keen to align skills and reduce fragmentation and duplication across the system. Oracy and the national curriculum must be considered in this context. For example, Skills England is developing a UK Skills Classification that includes speaking and listening skills, while guidance for T-Levels and apprenticeships - also from the department - is similarly aligned around the same definition of speaking and listening.

⁸³ Seidenberg, M. (2017). *Language at the Speed of Sight: How We Read, Why So Many Can't, and What Can Be Done About It*. Basic Books.

⁸⁴ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel*. U.S. Government Printing Office.

- **Support other essential skills as well as media and digital literacy.** Skills like problem solving and creativity and predictors of life outcomes and form part of a complete education. They underpin topics like media literacy, where investigating bias, logical reasoning, and reflecting critically are all vital.
- **Interoperable taxonomy design.** Speaking and listening feature widely in skills taxonomies. There has been significant research into what building a successful and interoperable skills taxonomy consists of, and learnings from other frameworks such as Scotland's Meta Skills Framework and Singapore's Core Skills.

Examples of best practice

The Universal Framework

Compatibility requires taking a holistic view of where speaking and listening sit relative to other essential skills alongside a consistent structure for defining them. The national curriculum can ensure that speaking and listening are aligned with other government policies, the rest of the curriculum and other skills taxonomies by supporting a shared approach already used in other areas. For example, the Universal Framework is already contained in other government policies, and is aligned to the department's UK Skills Classification.

Policy Recommendation 9

- Provide guidance that supports alignment of oracy with other essential skills.
- Align oracy in the national curriculum with the work of Skills England.
- Enable interoperability with other skills taxonomies by adopting a compatible approach.

4. Case studies: Speaking and Listening in action

The principles and criteria outlined in this toolkit are not theoretical ideals but are already being successfully implemented in schools across the UK. These case studies serve to illustrate the tangible benefits of a focused approach to Speaking and Listening education and demonstrate how a structured framework can underpin effective practice. They showcase "what works" and provide inspiration for wider adoption.

Showcasing what it looks like in practice - the "How To"

Primary school

Grange primary school, Hartlepool (Skills Builder Gold Award)

Grange primary school reports that the explicit teaching of speaking and listening skills has ensured that learners have a better understanding of their existing skills, how to build them and identify how skills are used and practised in many different settings.

- **Consistent, sequenced approach to speaking and listening:** The Skills Builder approach is embedded throughout school life from Nursery to Year 6 and key terminology is used consistently across school.
- **Simple approach:** Teachers report high impact for a simple approach to implement in practice. All classrooms have speaking and listening posters on display and teachers make reference to and highlight these skills as needed during lessons.
- **Supporting SEND learners:** Learners in the SEND class are explicitly taught the skills twice weekly in incremental steps.
- **Regular assessment of learner progress:** Teachers assess learners' speaking and listening using the Skills Builder Hub assessment tool at the start of the year to identify the starting point. Throughout the year, staff regularly assess learners again to track the progress they are making in speaking and listening.
- **Explicit focus on teaching speaking and listening skills:** All classes have a weekly lesson on essential skills, which has included a focus on speaking and listening given the oracy curriculum. Staff report that use of the Universal Framework has helped to develop speaking and listening skills across school and provide children with regular opportunities to practise these skills.

- **Practising speaking and listening across the curriculum:** Teachers build in opportunities for learners to build their skills as part of community projects, whole school events (Queen's Jubilee celebrations/ World Book Day) and after-school clubs.
- **Real life application:** Grange school uses a variety of community projects and employers visits to support learners relate the skills to wider life. Employer visits include visits from the Police Force, Fire Brigade and local housing group. Children also take offsite visits including to the local art gallery. The school has developed links with local businesses so that children have opportunities to see and hear about how employers and employees use the essential skills in their everyday working lives.

Secondary school

Looe Community Academy, Cornwall (Skills Builder Gold Award)

Looe Community Academy provides a clear illustration of how the Skills Builder Universal Framework and its principles can be practically implemented to foster Speaking and Listening skills.

- **Explicit Framework Use:** Year 11 students explicitly focus on Speaking and Listening skills from the Universal Framework in preparation for mock interviews with employers and when creating CVs. Work experience booklets prompt reflection on essential skills, including communication, with employer input.
- **Dedicated Time & Resources:** The school dedicates weekly sessions using resources from the Skills Builder Hub, adapting them to meet student needs, thereby ensuring "Explicit Instruction" and "Ample Practice."
- **Curriculum Integration & Reinforcement:** Essential skills are deliberately planned into the written curriculum ("Keep practising") and reinforced through extracurricular activities such as debate workshops.
- **Real-World Connections:** Teacher training emphasises building essential skills through links to the working world, and students participate in challenge days and hear from visitors (e.g., paramedics, RNLI) who demonstrate the professional use of these skills ("Bring it to life").
- **Systematic Approach:** The school's strategic plan aims for all schools in its trust to achieve a Skills Builder Gold Award, indicating a systematic and whole-school commitment ("Keep it simple," "Start early, keep going," "Measure it").

Grantham College and University Centre, Lincolnshire (Skills Builder Gold award)

- **A simple and consistent shared language:** Speaking and listening skill icons and posters are placed across the school. Information on the essential skills is shared with local employers as part of our students' Essential Skills work experience targets, so that employers can assess them..
- **Regular assessment of skills:** Students self-assess their speaking and listening skills using Skills Builder Benchmark at the start of the term, and then on a termly basis to assess progress. Staff use the Hub to assess their students at a group level, to ensure they are placing emphasis on the most appropriate skills steps when teaching their students. Students' self-assessment data in Term 1 is analysed to inform priorities for teaching. Speaking and Listening were the focus in Terms 1 and 2 respectively. Staff support learners to gather evidence of skills, based on their activities.
- **Speaking and listening in subject teaching:** Subject lessons include a section focused on building skills explicitly and lesson activities help learners practice their speaking and listening skills. Based on the individual assessments, staff determine the appropriate skill steps to teach.
- **Opportunities to practice speaking skills:** In lessons on Speaking for example, students have been given a choice of speeches previously given by a range of famous people and asked to practise and then deliver them in their groups, with appropriate tone, expression and gestures (Speaking step 7). One member of staff recorded the students so they could watch and listen to themselves and identify areas for improvement.
- **Integrated into careers education and personal development:** Development of essential skills is regularly included in careers lessons each week (the skills step of focus is determined by evaluating students skills assessments). Essential skills are also developed through the college Personal Development Tutorial Programme.
- **Explicit focus on speaking and listening through annual work placements:** Prior to their 30 hours of annual work experience, students are asked to consider their priorities for development and to select two skills (which may include speaking and listening) they want to work on during their placement. They then record their activities in their logbooks which are enabling them to practice their skills. Employers assess their competency in the skills at the end of the placement, providing feedback to the learner.

The practices in these diverse schools, whether explicitly using the Skills Builder methodology or aligning with its core tenets, demonstrate that a structured, intentional approach to Speaking and Listening yields significant benefits.

These case studies collectively offer compelling evidence that high-quality Speaking and Listening education is achievable and impactful. However, as the *We Need to Talk* report notes, such examples often represent "oases of oracy" within a national landscape that remains "patchy and inconsistent".⁸⁵ The critical challenge for national policy is to transform these isolated pockets of excellence into consistent, systemic, and equitable provision for all students across England.

The blueprint proposed in this paper, underpinned by a common, progressive framework, offers the necessary mechanisms - national standards, comprehensive teacher training, supportive assessment structures, and curriculum integration - to scale these successful approaches. The barrier to widespread excellence is not a lack of understanding of *what* works, but rather the absence of a coherent systemic infrastructure and the policy levers required to make effective Speaking and Listening education a universal entitlement. This toolkit aims to provide precisely that infrastructure, enabling every school to cultivate these essential skills in every child.

⁸⁵ *ibid*

Annex: Mapping recommendations from *We Need to Talk* into actionable policies in this toolkit

Key recommendation from 'We Need To Talk'	Corresponding policy recommendation or toolkit criterion in this paper
Make oracy a core aspect of education (EYFS-Post 16)	
Adopt a broad and expansive definition of oracy... embed throughout curriculum requirements.	Policy Rec 1 (National Framework); Policy Rec 2 (Knowledge Base); toolkit Criterion 3.2
Introduce an oracy entitlement throughout primary and secondary National Curriculum... experiences, skills, and knowledge.	Policy Rec 1 (National Framework); Policy Rec 6 (Explicit Instruction & Practice); toolkit Criterion 3.1
Invest in early language development to reduce language inequities.	Policy Rec 7 (Inclusivity & Equity); toolkit Criterion 3.7
Incentivise schools to provide a broad curriculum... expressive arts and citizenship as contexts for oracy.	Policy Rec 6 (Explicit Instruction & Practice)

Integrate the study of spoken language into secondary English curriculum... critical language awareness.	Policy Rec 2 (Knowledge Base); toolkit Criterion 3.2
Build oracy into teacher training and development	
Ensure all teachers are skilled in using dialogue and discussion... in ITT and ongoing development.	Policy Rec 5 (Teacher Training); toolkit Criterion 3.5
Require teacher training... include understanding of SLCN and support strategies.	Policy Rec 5 (Teacher Training); Policy Rec 7 (Inclusivity & Equity); toolkit Criterion 3.5 & 3.7
Make oracy a key component of leadership development.	Policy Rec 5 (Teacher Training - specialist leadership roles)
Provide a programme of professional development to support an oracy entitlement.	Policy Rec 5 (Teacher Training - ongoing CPD)
Promote evidence-based approaches to oracy	
Publish non-statutory guidance... to implement high-quality oracy education.	Policy Rec 1 (Clear, Progressive, Age-related Expectations); Policy Rec 3 (International Best Practice & Guidance)
Support subject associations in providing training and resources... disciplinary approaches to oracy.	Policy Rec 5 (Teacher Training); Policy Rec 6 (Explicit Instruction & Practice)

Establish a foundational body and evidence-based source of expertise.	toolkit Criterion 3.2 (Knowledge Base); Policy Rec 3 (Guidance informed by evidence-based frameworks)
Reflect scope and value of oracy in assessment and accountability	
Reform GCSE English Language... teaches young people about history, influence, diversity of English.	Policy Rec 4 (Assessment Methods - reform existing qualifications)
Increase emphasis on assessment to enhance learning... diagnostic and formative assessment tools.	Policy Rec 4 (Assessment Methods - prioritise formative); toolkit Criterion 3.4
Investigate feasibility of formal assessment of speaking & listening... functional skills passport or new GCSE.	Policy Rec 4 (Assessment Methods - explore summative)
Acknowledge the role of oracy in quality of education... new school accountability dashboard.	Systemic integration and valuing of Speaking & Listening.

Annex: Speaking and Listening in the Universal Framework 2.0



Universal Framework 2.0: Speaking / Communication

Transmitting information or ideas

	Step Number	Step Summary and Descriptor
Getting started	Step 1	Sharing clearly I communicate clearly with someone I know
	Step 2	Discussing together I communicate clearly in a small group
	Step 3	Meeting others I communicate with new people when I need to
	Step 4	Organising thoughts I order my points to be understood
Intermediate	Step 5	Knowing the audience I adapt my communication to what my audience already know
	Step 6	Choosing language I choose appropriate language for the situation
	Step 7	Expressing self I use tone, expression and gesture to be understood
	Step 8	Using facts I use facts and examples to support my communication
Advanced	Step 9	Sharing visuals I use images, charts or diagrams when it helps my communication
	Step 10	Communicating sensitively I talk about difficult or sensitive topics effectively
	Step 11	Speaking engagingly I communicate in a way that is engaging for my audience
	Step 12	Adaptive communicating I adapt my communication depending on audience reactions
Mastery	Step 13	Negotiating I manage discussions effectively to reach an agreement
	Step 14	Constructive communicating I maintain clear and constructive communication in challenging situations
	Step 15	Presenting I present to an audience when required
	Step 16	Inspiring others I communicate a vision persuasively



Universal Framework 2.0: Listening / Communication

Receiving, retaining and processing information

	Step Number	Step Summary and Descriptor
Getting started	Step 1	Focusing I can listen for at least a short time
	Step 2	Recalling I remember simple instructions
	Step 3	Checking I ask questions if I don't understand
	Step 4	Retelling I pass on information accurately
Intermediate	Step 5	Recognising purpose I know why someone is communicating with me
	Step 6	Note-taking I record important information
	Step 7	Active listening I show I am paying attention
	Step 8	Questioning I ask open questions to understand more
Advanced	Step 9	Summarising I rephrase or summarise what I learnt
	Step 10	Recognising tone I recognise tone of communication
	Step 11	Identifying influence I recognise when someone is trying to influence me
	Step 12	Comparing views I compare different points of view
Mastery	Step 13	Analysing views I explore why different views might come about
	Step 14	Investigating bias I analyse where bias is shown
	Step 15	Strategic questioning I use questions to challenge perspectives
	Step 16	Evaluating perspectives I objectively evaluate and integrate different perspectives

Annex: Knowledge-base examples from Educators Handbook⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ravenscroft, T. (2025). Skills Builder Handbook for Educators: Universal Framework 2.0 Edition.



Sharing clearly

I communicate clearly with someone I know



Building blocks

- A)** I know what it means to speak and communicate
- B)** I know why speaking and communication are important
- C)** I know how to speak clearly



Core ideas

A

What it means to speak and communicate

Communication is how we share information, ideas, and feelings between people. It helps us understand each other and work together. Communication can take different forms:

- *Verbal communication:* Using spoken words to express thoughts.
- *Non-verbal communication:* Using body language, facial expressions, and gestures.
- *Written communication:* Sending messages through writing, such as emails, letters, or texts.
- *Visual communication:* Using images, signs, or videos to convey a message.

Speaking is a way of communicating using spoken words. It allows us to share information, express emotions, and connect with others.

B

Why speaking and communication are important

Good communication helps build relationships, solve problems, and work effectively. It can be formal, like a business meeting, or informal, like chatting with a friend.

We speak for different reasons, such as:

- *Sharing information:* Explaining ideas, giving instructions, or teaching.
- *Expressing emotions:* Showing happiness, anger, or excitement.
- *Building relationships:* Making friends, meeting people, or supporting others.
- *Persuading or influencing:* Encouraging people to agree with our ideas.

Some individuals do not speak *verbally*, but use other tools to communicate. Lots of the ideas for how to get better at speaking also apply to using these other tools.



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

C**How to speak clearly**

Speaking clearly ensures that others understand you. Some ways of making sure we are speaking clearly are:

- *Speak at a steady pace:* Avoid talking too fast or too slowly.
- *Pronounce words carefully:* Say each word so it is easy to understand.
- *Use simple language:* Avoid long or difficult words when they are not needed.
- *Pause sometimes:* Give listeners time to process information.
- *Control your volume:* Speak loud enough to be heard but not too loudly.
- *Use body language:* Gestures and facial expressions help make your message clearer to the listener.

By practising these skills, you can communicate your message effectively and ensure people understand what you are saying.



Assessment

Reflective questions for learners can include:

- What is communicating, and what are some ways to do it?
- Why are speaking and communication important?
- How can you speak clearly?
- When have you shown that you can speak clearly?

Observation cues for educators can include:

- Is the learner able to speak clearly to others?

Evidence can include learners' self-reflections and observations from others.

Identifying influence

I recognise when someone is trying to influence me



Building blocks

- A)** I know what is meant by influence
- B)** I know why it is important to recognise someone's influence
- C)** I know how to recognise and manage others' influence



Core ideas

A

What is meant by influence

Influence is when someone tries to shape your thoughts, feelings, or decisions. Influence is not always bad - it can be positive, like when someone encourages you to work hard. However, it can also be used to persuade you to do something that benefits the other person more than you.

People try to influence others for different reasons, including:

- *To persuade you:* They may want you to agree with their opinion or support their idea.
- *To sell something:* A business or salesperson may use influence to encourage you to buy a product.
- *To gain power or control:* Some people try to influence others to maintain authority or get what they want.
- *To change your behaviour:* This could be positive, like encouraging healthy habits, or negative, like peer pressure.

B

Why it is important to recognise someone's influence

It is important to recognise when someone is trying to influence you in conversation so that you can think carefully before making decisions. People may try to persuade you for different reasons—some may have good intentions, while others may be trying to benefit themselves.

By noticing influence, you can ask questions, consider different viewpoints, and make informed choices. It also helps you to stay confident in your own opinions rather than feeling pressured. Recognising influence allows you to respond thoughtfully rather than reacting too quickly, ensuring that you stay in control of your own decisions and actions.

C

How to recognise and manage others' influence

When listening, it's important to be aware of when someone is trying to influence your thoughts, feelings, or decisions. Here are some key signs to look out for:

1. *Strong emotional appeals:* If someone is using emotional language or trying to make you feel guilty, excited, or fearful, they may be trying to influence you. For example: *"If you really cared about me, you would do this"* (Guilt) or *"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – don't miss out!"* (Excitement)
2. *Repeating key messages:* When people repeat the same phrase or idea several times, they are reinforcing their point to make it seem more important or true. This can make you more likely to agree, even if you weren't convinced at first.



3. *Using flattery or personal connections:* If someone compliments you a lot or highlights things you have in common, they might be trying to gain your trust to influence your decision. For example, *"You're such a smart person – I know you'll see that this is the right choice."*
4. *Creating a sense of urgency:* If someone pressures you to make a quick decision, they may be trying to stop you from thinking too much about it. Phrases like *"You must decide now"* or *"This deal won't last"* are common tactics.
5. *Only sharing one perspective:* Influencers may leave out key facts or only tell you the side of the story that supports their point.
6. *Claiming to be an expert or authority:* Someone may try to influence you by saying an expert or authority figure agrees with them. Be cautious and check if the source is reliable.
7. *Peer pressure:* Messages like *"Everyone else is doing it"* or *"You don't want to be left out"* are designed to influence you through social pressure.

Recognising these tactics will help you think clearly and make choices based on facts rather than pressure or manipulation.



Assessment

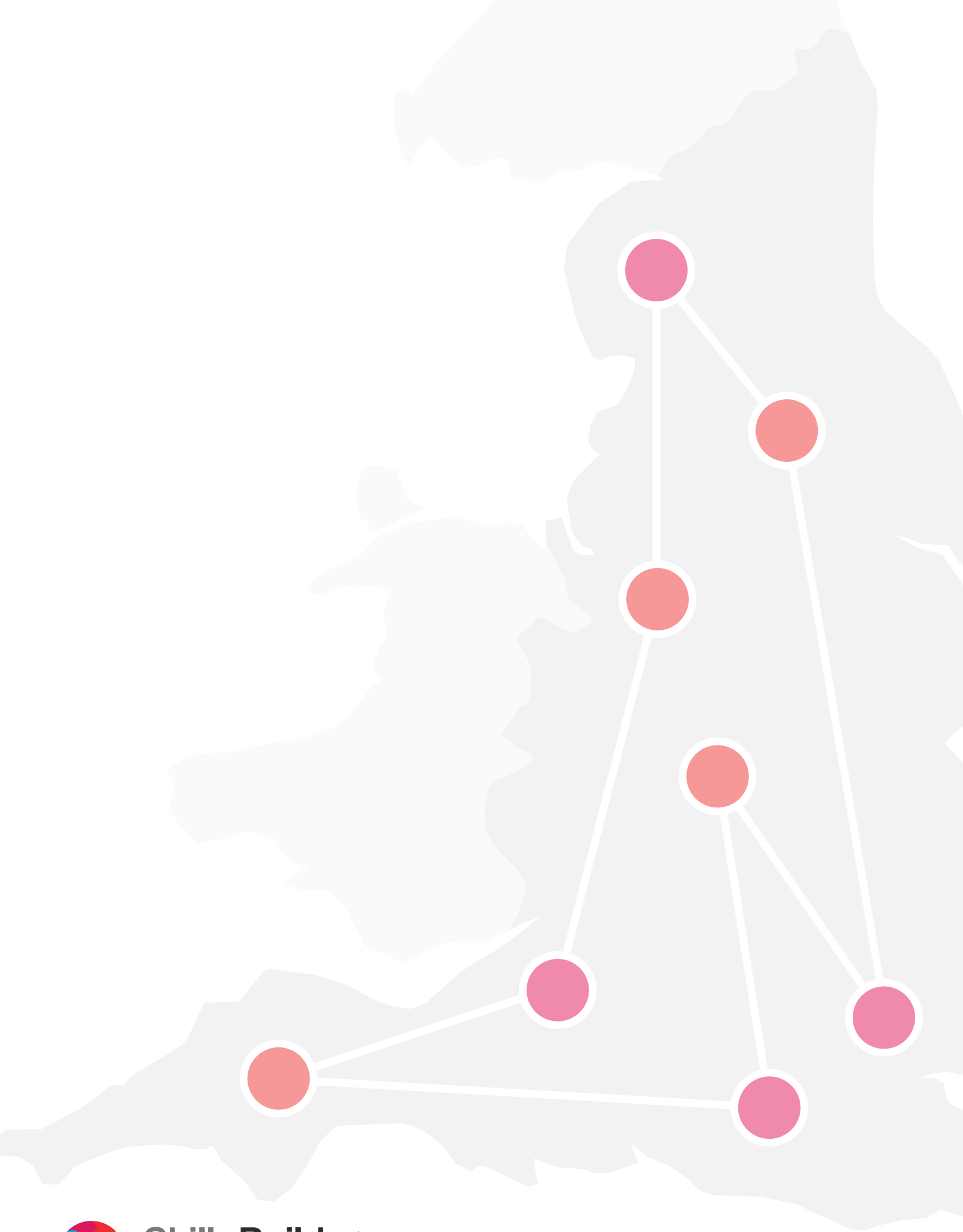
Reflective questions for learners can include:

- What is influence?
- Why is it important to recognise when someone is trying to influence you?
- How can you recognise attempts at influencing you?
- When has someone or something tried to influence you and how did you know?

Observation cues for educators can include:

- Is the learner able to identify when someone is trying to influence them?
- Is the learner able to avoid being unduly or inappropriately influenced?

Evidence can include learners' self-reflections, examples of being able to identify influencing techniques, and observations from others.



Skills Builder
PARTNERSHIP