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Assembly

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# Oracy Education in Northern Ireland

**NIAR 41-26**

The Department of Education's "Strong Foundations: Literacy Framework" (December 2025) offers guidance to strengthen oracy, reading and writing in Northern Ireland's primary schools. This paper explains oracy education and its links to attainment, equity, employability and civic participation. It considers inclusion and language diversity in the context of Northern Ireland; and compares oracy provision across the UK and Republic of Ireland.

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## Key Points

- Oracy is the ability to communicate effectively through speaking and listening. It is increasingly recognised internationally as a foundational skill alongside literacy and numeracy, with growing policy attention across the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
- The TransformED Literacy Framework, launched in December 2025, names oracy as a pillar of primary literacy in Northern Ireland. However, it covers primary education only. There is currently no post-primary equivalent or standalone oracy strategy.
- In England, new primary and secondary oracy frameworks have been announced for first teaching from September 2028.
- There is substantial evidence that structured oracy teaching improves attainment. The Education Endowment Fund's (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit, drawing on 188 studies, finds that oral language interventions lead to an average of six additional months' progress, with the strongest effects for younger pupils and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence base is less developed at secondary level and does not yet extend to longer-term outcomes.
- Communication is consistently among the skills most valued by employers. The UK Employer Skills Survey 2024, covering 22,712 employers across all four nations, found that 69% of skill-shortage vacancies were caused at least in part by a lack of applicants with people and interpersonal skills, including oral communication.
- Inclusion and language diversity are relevant considerations for the definition, intent and practice of oracy education. The school population in Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly multilingual, with nearly 21,000 newcomer pupils and over 7,800 pupils in Irish-medium education.
- Speech, language and communication needs can be supported by oracy provision. There is a lack of speech and language therapists in Northern Ireland and no commissioned posts in post-primary schools. Northern Ireland currently lacks a regional-specific tool for assessing speech, language and communication development at school entry.

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# 1 Background

The term 'oracy' was coined by the educationist Andrew Wilkinson in the 1960s to describe proficiency in spoken language, paralleling 'literacy' for written language.<sup>1</sup> Though the centrality of spoken language to learning was recognised over 50 years ago<sup>2</sup>, oracy has historically received less curricular attention and fewer resources than reading, writing and numeracy.<sup>3</sup>

Parliamentary interest in oracy has accelerated since 2019. The Westminster Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)'s [Speak for Change report](#) (April 2021) called for a national shift in the priority given to speaking and listening.<sup>4</sup> The independent Commission on the Future of Oracy Education ("The Oracy Commission") in England followed with [We Need to Talk](#) (October 2024), framing oracy as a 'fourth R' alongside reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>5</sup> The [Curriculum and Assessment Review](#) in England (November 2025) made an oracy framework its first recommendation.<sup>6</sup> The Government accepted, [announcing new primary and secondary oracy frameworks](#) to accompany a revised national curriculum for first teaching in September 2028.<sup>7</sup>

In Northern Ireland, [Strong Foundations: A Literacy Framework for Primary Schools](#) was launched in December 2025. It is an important component of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson, A. et al., 'Spoken English', *Educational Review Occasional Publications* (1965) Vol. 17(2)

<sup>2</sup> UK Government Department of Education and Science 'A Language for Life (The Bullock Report)' HMSO (1975).

<sup>3</sup> Millard, W. and Menzies, L. 'The State of Speaking in Our Schools' Voice 21/LKMco (2016).

<sup>4</sup> UK Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group, '[Speak for Change: Final Report and Recommendations from the Oracy APPG Inquiry. p. 34](#)' (2021)

<sup>5</sup> Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England, '[We Need to Talk. p. 5](#)' (2024)

<sup>6</sup> UK Department for Education, 'Curriculum and Assessment Review [Building a World-Class Curriculum for All: Final Report](#)' (2025)

<sup>7</sup> UK Department for Education, '[Curriculum and Assessment Review: Government Response](#)' (2025)

broader [TransformED strategy](#) for education reform.<sup>8</sup> The framework explicitly names oracy alongside reading and writing as a pillar of primary literacy.<sup>9</sup>

## 2 What is oracy education?

Oracy education involves the deliberate, structured teaching of speaking, listening and communication skills. It goes beyond incidental classroom talk, encompassing competences that are teachable, assessable and transferable across subjects. The Oracy Commission defines oracy as ‘articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication.’ The Commission breaks oracy down into three inter-related dimensions.

- *Learning to talk*, listen and communicate (developing the skill set)
- *Learning through talking*, listening and communication (using dialogue to deepen understanding across subjects)
- *Learning about talk* (building knowledge of how language works in different contexts)<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1 Learning to talk

The Oracy Skills Framework<sup>11</sup> is especially useful for understanding *learning to talk*.

[The framework](#), developed by the University of Cambridge and School 21, breaks oracy into four strands:

- **Physical:** voice projection, pace, gesture and eye contact.

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<sup>8</sup> Northern Ireland Department of Education, ‘[TransformED NI: Transforming teaching and learning - a strategy for Educational Excellence in Northern Ireland](#)’ (2025)

<sup>9</sup> Northern Ireland Department of Education, ‘[Strong Foundations: Literacy Framework in Primary Schools](#)’ (2025)

<sup>10</sup> Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England, p. 14 (2024). As footnote 5.

<sup>11</sup> Mercer, N., Warwick, P. and Ahmed, A., ‘[The Oracy Skills Framework](#)’ (2017)

- **Linguistic:** vocabulary choice, register, rhetorical techniques and structure
- **Cognitive:** reasoning, summarising, critically examining ideas and self-regulation.
- **Social and emotional:** turn-taking, listening actively, confidence and audience awareness.

The Oracy Skills Framework has been widely adopted by schools and organisations in England and Wales.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 Learning through talk

Dialogic and talk-based teaching approaches underpin learning through talk.

Dialogic teaching uses classroom conversation to deepen students' thinking and understanding. Research shows that high-quality talk improves engagement and attainment. Teachers use dialogue to spot gaps in understanding and check progress in real time.

Students benefit from clear guidance on how to discuss ideas constructively with one another. Approaches rooted in drama and theatre also show positive effects on both academic and wider outcomes.

## 2.3 Learning about talk

Studying spoken language helps pupils understand how factors such as audience, purpose, and setting shape the way people speak. It draws on ideas from linguistics, rhetoric, and communication studies. Research in critical language awareness argues that pupils benefit from understanding how language choices reflect and reproduce social relationships, and that this understanding is a prerequisite for effective civic participation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Education Endowment Foundation, '[Voice 21: Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit](#).' (2024)

<sup>13</sup> Fairclough, N., 'Critical Language Awareness' *London: Longman*. (1992)

### 3 Why does oracy matter for learning?

Research shows oracy education has positive impacts within the classroom and beyond. Oral language interventions boost academic attainment, with particular efficacy for disadvantaged learners. Oracy skills are linked to employability and democratic participation.

#### 3.1 Academic attainment

There is substantial evidence that structured oracy teaching is associated with gains in reading comprehension, writing and subject understanding. The [Education Endowment Fund's Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#), drawing on 188 studies and rated as high-security evidence, finds that oral language interventions lead to an average of six additional months' progress over one year.<sup>14</sup> The impact is highest in the early years (approximately seven months' additional progress) and primary settings (six months), with a positive but smaller effect at secondary level (five months).<sup>15</sup> Interventions delivered frequently (three+ sessions per week) over a sustained period are most effective.<sup>16</sup>

#### 3.2 Equity and disadvantage

Research by Save the Children<sup>17</sup> found that one in four children who struggled with language at age five did not reach the expected standard in English at the end of primary school, compared with one in 25 children who had good language skills at the same age. Spencer et al. (2017) found that vocabulary

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<sup>14</sup> Education Endowment Foundation, 'Teaching and Learning Toolkit: [Oral Language Interventions](#).' (2025)

<sup>15</sup> Education Endowment Foundation, '[What does the evidence base tell us about effective oral language practice?](#)' (2024)

<sup>16</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2025). As footnote 14.

<sup>17</sup> Save the Children / UCL Institute of Education, '[Early Language Development and Children's Primary School Attainment in English and Maths](#).' (2015)

skills at age 13 strongly predicted both English and maths GCSE results.<sup>18</sup> Research from the UK Oracy APPG Inquiry found that two thirds of primary teachers reported that school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative effect on the spoken language development of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, compared with their peers.<sup>19</sup> The EEF evidence indicates that oral language interventions are particularly effective for disadvantaged pupils: studies with higher proportions of disadvantaged participants tended to show larger positive effects.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.3 Wider skills and employability

Communication is consistently identified as one of the skills most valued by employers. The UK Employer Skills Survey 2024, a government survey of 22,712 employers across all four UK nations, found that 69% of skill-shortage vacancies were caused at least in part by a lack of people and interpersonal skills, including oral communication.<sup>21</sup> The skills involved in structured classroom talk, including articulating ideas clearly, listening actively, adapting language to context, and collaborating verbally, overlap substantially with the communication competences employers describe.

### 3.4 Civic engagement and democratic participation

Research links oracy skills to the competences required for democratic participation. Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick (2008) argue that the norms of structured classroom discussion i.e. backing claims with evidence, reasoning logically and building on others' contributions - are the same norms

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<sup>18</sup> Spencer, S., Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J. and Rush, R., 'Contribution of spoken language and socio-economic background to adolescents' educational achievement at age 16 years.' *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, (2017) Vol. 52(2)

<sup>19</sup> UK Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group, '[Speak for Change: Final Report and Recommendations from the Oracy APPG Inquiry. p. 10](#)' (2021)

<sup>20</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2025). As footnote 14.

<sup>21</sup> UK Department for Education, '[Employer Skills Survey 2024: full UK research report.](#)' (2025)

underpinning deliberative discourse in civic life.<sup>22</sup> Mercer and Littleton (2007) demonstrate that the capacity to argue from evidence and reach reasoned consensus is teachable through structured group talk, not an innate trait.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.5 Limitations of the evidence base

While the overall evidence base for oral language interventions is rated as strong by the EEF, more longitudinal research is needed on how oracy gains transfer to longer-term outcomes such as post-16 attainment and employment. The evidence for the impact of oral language interventions on attainment is substantial at early years and primary level. It is less extensive at secondary level, where the EEF Toolkit draws on fewer studies and reports a smaller effect size of five months' additional progress compared with seven months in the early years.

The EEF also notes that small-group interventions tend to show larger effects than whole-class approaches, which raises questions about whether the benefits observed in targeted settings can be replicated at scale through universal provision. Implementation is a further constraint. Research consistently identifies teacher skill and confidence as a limiting factor.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that the relationship between oracy teaching and attainment is not automatic and depends on the quality, duration, and fidelity of implementation.

## 4 Context in Northern Ireland

To ensure that the definition, intent and practice of oracy education meets the needs of all learners, The Oracy Commission report raised three areas of

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<sup>22</sup> Michaels, S. et al., 'Deliberative discourse idealized and realized: accountable talk in the classroom and in civic life.' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* (2008) Vol 27, 283–297.

<sup>23</sup> Mercer, N. and Littleton, K., 'Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking: A Sociocultural Approach.' *Routledge* (2007)

<sup>24</sup> Dunlop, L., Compton, K., Clarke, L. and McKelvey-Martin, V., 'Child-led enquiry in primary science', *Education 3–13* (2015) Vol. 43(5), pp. 462–481. and Earle, S., Parfitt, A. and Read, S., 'Review of scientific literacy and oracy in primary school education' (2025)

consideration: inclusion, learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and language diversity<sup>25</sup>. This section presents the status quo of oracy education in Northern Ireland and considers policy frameworks; speech, language and communication needs; and linguistic diversity in Northern Ireland.

#### 4.1 Current Oracy Education in Northern Ireland

Communication is one of three cross-curricular skills (alongside Using Mathematics and Using ICT) at the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.<sup>26</sup> Oracy is addressed within the Language and Literacy Area of Learning at primary level and through the English programmes of study at Key Stages 3 and 4.<sup>27</sup>

The CCEA GCSE English Language specification includes a Speaking and Listening unit (Unit 2) as controlled assessment worth 20% of the total qualification, requiring students to be assessed in an individual presentation and interaction, a discussion, and a role play.<sup>28</sup> This policy gives spoken language a more prominent assessment status than in England, where the spoken language endorsement does not contribute to the overall GCSE grade (see Section 5 below).

Learning through talk is an implicit element of Northern Ireland's Shared Education programme. The programme links schools across the traditional community divide for joint curricular work. It was placed on a statutory footing by the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.<sup>29</sup> Austin et al. (2022) found that both face-to-face contact and online interaction, particularly video-conferencing, created opportunities for pupils to develop spoken communication skills within the programme. Teachers reported that the

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<sup>25</sup> Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England, '[We Need to Talk. pp. 43.](#)' (2024)

<sup>26</sup> CCEA, '[The Northern Ireland Curriculum.](#)' (2007)

<sup>27</sup> As above

<sup>28</sup> CCEA, '[GCSE English Language specification.](#)' (2017)

<sup>29</sup> [Shared Education Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#)

presence of a partner school audience motivated learners to develop their oracy through listening to different accents and expressing their own ideas.<sup>30</sup>

## 4.2 Policy framework and post-primary transition

The TransformED Literacy Framework (see Section 1 above) provides guidance on embedding talking and listening across P1 to P7. Its accompanying guidelines set out a model for whole-school approaches to literacy that integrate oracy into planning and practice.<sup>31</sup> The framework covers primary education only. There is no post-primary equivalent. Progression from the framework's approach to oracy is therefore not formally supported at the primary-to-post-primary transition. This is the point at which language demands increase as pupils engage with more abstract concepts, subject-specific vocabulary, and formal academic discourse.

Although Northern Ireland's 20% GCSE weighting gives spoken language a more prominent assessment status than in England (see Table 1 in Section 5.5), assessment weighting alone does not indicate the quality or extent of oracy teaching across schools. Implementation of the framework will depend on workforce readiness. A 2025 Royal Society review found that many teachers may lack training in dialogic approaches even where oracy is named in frameworks.<sup>32</sup>

Research conducted in Northern Ireland primary schools found that a child-led enquiry approach (the Community of Scientific Enquiry) developed pupils' confidence and oracy skills among children aged 8 to 11, but that teachers required additional experience in facilitation and in integrating structured talk

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<sup>30</sup> Austin, R., Roulston, S., Skinner, B. and Taggart, S., 'Blended learning and collaborative interaction between schools: evidence from the Shared Education programme in Northern Ireland.' (2022)

<sup>31</sup> Northern Ireland Department of Education, '[Strong Foundations: Literacy Framework in Primary Schools.](#)' (2025)

<sup>32</sup> Earle, S., Parfitt, A. and Read, S., '[Review of scientific literacy and oracy in primary school education.](#)' (2025)

into thematic teaching units.<sup>33</sup> Evidence on the extent of oracy-specific content in initial teacher education in Northern Ireland is limited.

### 4.3 Speech, language and communication needs

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) estimates that at least two children in every NI classroom have a speech, language or communication need (SLCN).<sup>34</sup> In areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, this proportion rises to approximately 50% of children starting school with delayed language or other identified communication needs.<sup>35</sup> They report that analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study found that 68% of NI five-year-olds who had experienced persistent poverty were below the average vocabulary level, compared with 38% of those with no experience of poverty.<sup>36</sup>

The RCSLT has recommended the development of a joint health and education early years speech, language and communication strategy, including a universal early language screening measure.<sup>37</sup> As noted above, the EEF identifies oral language interventions as having consistently high impact at relatively low cost, with evidence particularly strong for younger pupils and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Universal oracy provision, in which structured spoken language teaching is embedded across the curriculum for all pupils, may complement specialist speech and language therapy by ensuring that the everyday language environment is designed to develop spoken communication.

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<sup>33</sup> Dunlop, L., Compton, K., Clarke, L. and McKelvey-Martin, V., 'Child-led enquiry in primary science', *Education 3–13*, (2015) Vol. 43(5), pp. 462–481.

<sup>34</sup> Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, '[NI Independent Review of Education: briefing from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.](#)' (2022)

<sup>35</sup> As footnote 31

<sup>36</sup> As footnote 31

<sup>37</sup> As footnote 31

#### 4.4 Linguistic diversity

Northern Ireland's school population is becoming increasingly multilingual and linguistically diverse. In 2025/26, there were nearly 21,000 newcomer pupils in NI schools, accounting for 6.0% of the school population<sup>38</sup>. The Education Authority defines a newcomer pupil as "[a pupil whose home language is not English or Irish and who may require support in school for this reason](#)".<sup>39</sup> This represents an increase of over 3,800 since 2020/21.<sup>40</sup> The Language Trends NI 2025 survey found that 63.2% of responding primary schools have learners for whom English is an additional language (EAL), and that almost 30 different languages are spoken at home by young people in post-primary schools.<sup>41</sup>

For newcomer and EAL pupils, spoken language proficiency is central to curriculum access, relationship-building, and participation in school life. Strand, Malmberg and Hall (2015) found that English language proficiency is the single strongest predictor of educational achievement for EAL learners.<sup>42</sup> Research from Northern Ireland is consistent with these patterns. Loader et al. (2023) reported that in 2018/19, 59% of newcomer pupils obtained five or more GCSEs at grades A–C, compared with 87% of non-newcomers and 86% of former newcomers.<sup>43</sup>

Irish-medium education represents a further dimension of linguistic diversity in Northern Ireland. Currently, 7,811 pupils participate in funded Irish-medium education (IME) in Northern Ireland, with numbers rising steadily.<sup>44</sup> IME

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<sup>38</sup> NISRA, '[Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2025/26](#).' (2026)

<sup>39</sup> Northern Ireland Education Authority, '[Newcomers](#)' (2025)

<sup>40</sup> As footnote 38

<sup>41</sup> Duff, J. and Collen, I., '[Language Trends Northern Ireland](#).' (2025)

<sup>42</sup> Strand, S., Malmberg, L. and Hall, J., '[English as an Additional Language \(EAL\) and educational achievement in England: An analysis of the National Pupil Database](#).' (2015)

<sup>43</sup> Loader, R., Jiménez, E., O'Boyle, A. and Hughes, J., '[Experiences of education among minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland](#).' (2023)

<sup>44</sup> NISRA, '[Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2025/26](#).' (2026)

operates through an immersion model in which children acquire Irish primarily through listening and speaking before formal literacy instruction begins. IME pupils leave primary with similar levels of English language attainment to those in English-medium schools.<sup>45</sup>

These data indicate that pupils communicate, interact and use language across a wide range of environments. These environments influence how pupils learn to talk, learn through talk and learn about talk.

## 5 Comparing oracy education in the UK and Republic of Ireland

### 5.1 England

Spoken language is included in the aims of the National Curriculum for English and appears in the primary programmes of study as 12 statutory requirements spanning Years 1 to 6.<sup>46</sup> However, the requirements are less detailed than those for reading and writing, and there is no clear progression pathway.<sup>47</sup> At GCSE, a spoken language endorsement is assessed but does not contribute to the final grade. Commentators argue this has significantly diminished its status and the curriculum time allocated to it.<sup>48</sup>

The Oracy Commission recommended that oracy be integrated into every subject, built into teacher training and development, and reflected in assessment and accountability.<sup>49</sup> The UK Department for Education announced a new primary oracy framework and a combined secondary oracy, reading and

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<sup>45</sup> Education Authority Northern Ireland, '[Types of school: Irish-medium education.](#)' (2026)

<sup>46</sup> UK Department for Education, '[National curriculum in England: English programmes of study.](#)' (2014)

<sup>47</sup> Voice 21, '[Oracy in the curriculum: what is the current state of play?](#)' (2025)

<sup>48</sup> [Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England](#) (2024) pp. 36; UK Oracy APPG '[Speak for Change](#)' (2021), pp. 34

<sup>49</sup> As footnote 5

writing framework, with a revised curriculum to be published in Spring 2027 for first teaching from September 2028.<sup>50</sup> The framework will “help teachers strengthen their teaching of oracy through practical tips, tried-and-tested strategies and examples of best practice”.<sup>51</sup>

## 5.2 Scotland

'Listening and Talking' is one of the core strands of the Literacy and English component of the Curriculum for Excellence.<sup>52</sup> Experiences and Outcomes for listening and talking are set out from early level through to fourth level.<sup>53</sup> National 5 English includes an internally assessed spoken language component.<sup>54</sup> However, commentators have noted that there is little shared guidance on progression and no dedicated national oracy framework, meaning practice varies widely between schools.<sup>55</sup> Practitioners have called for Scotland to develop a more coherent national strategy for oracy, drawing on the frameworks emerging in England.

## 5.3 Wales

The Curriculum for Wales, which began its phased rollout from September 2022, positions oracy as a mandatory cross-curricular skill.<sup>56</sup> Within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience, progression in speaking, listening, and collaboration and discussion is set out

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<sup>50</sup> UK Department for Education, '[Government response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review](#).' (2025)

<sup>51</sup> As footnote 51

<sup>52</sup> Education Scotland, '[Curriculum for Excellence: literacy and English — experiences and outcomes](#).' (2009)

<sup>53</sup> As footnote 35

<sup>54</sup> SQA, '[National 5 English: course specification](#).' (2017)

<sup>55</sup> Voice 21, '[Oracy in the curriculum: what is the current state of play?](#)'. (2025)

<sup>56</sup> Welsh Government, '[Curriculum for Wales framework](#).' (2022)

explicitly, with descriptors at each progression step.<sup>57</sup> GCSE English Language includes a speaking and listening component that contributes to the overall grade.<sup>58</sup> An evidence review commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2018 from Oracy Cambridge identified key principles for teaching oracy across the Welsh curriculum:<sup>59</sup>

- oracy skills are explicitly teachable at any stage of schooling,
- teacher modelling and structured feedback on spoken communication enhance achievement
- oracy development can support bilingual learners
- oracy can help narrow the gap for pupils from economically deprived backgrounds

The review also highlighted the cognitive benefits of bilingualism and the growing importance of spoken communication skills for employability. However, implementation in practice remains at varying stages of completeness.

## 5.4 Republic of Ireland

The Republic of Ireland's Primary Language Curriculum is structured around three strands (oral language, reading, and writing), all equally weighted.<sup>60</sup> The curriculum was designed for use across all school settings (English-medium, Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and special schools), with equivalent learning outcomes in Irish and English linked throughout.<sup>61</sup>

At post-primary level, the Junior Cycle English specification is structured around three integrated strands of oral language, reading, and writing, using internally assessed oral communication tasks. Junior Cycle Irish, covering both

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<sup>57</sup> As footnote 56

<sup>58</sup> Welsh Joint Education Committee, '[GCSE English Language specification](#).' (2017)

<sup>59</sup> Oracy Cambridge, '[Oracy in the Welsh curriculum: an evidence review](#)' (2018)

<sup>60</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, '[Primary Language Curriculum](#)' (2019)

<sup>61</sup> As footnote 60

Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools (where Irish is a first language) and English-medium schools (Irish as a second/other language), similarly assesses students' oral competence internally.<sup>62</sup>

At Leaving Certificate level, Irish and modern foreign languages include externally examined oral components worth 40% of the total mark<sup>63</sup>, but English currently does not. In March 2025, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment published a draft revised Leaving Certificate English specification proposing the introduction of an oral examination as an Additional Assessment Component.<sup>64</sup> It has not yet been implemented.

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<sup>62</sup> Republic of Ireland Department of Education, '[State Examinations — oral examinations in Junior Cycle Irish](#)' (2022)

<sup>63</sup> [State Examinations Commission](#) (2025)

<sup>64</sup> Republic of Ireland National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, '[Draft curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate English](#)' (2025)

## 5.5 Co

## 5.6 Comparing the jurisdictions

Table 1. This table compares current oracy provision in UK jurisdictions and Republic of Ireland.

Jurisdiction	Curriculum status of oracy	GCSE / terminal assessment	National oracy framework or strategy
<b>Northern Ireland<sup>65</sup></b>	Communication is one of three cross-curricular skills in the NI Curriculum. Oracy addressed within Language and Literacy (primary) and English programmes of study (KS3–4).	CCEA GCSE English Language: Speaking and Listening unit worth 20% (controlled assessment); <b>contributes to overall grade</b>	<b>No standalone oracy strategy.</b> TransformED Literacy Framework (Dec 2025) names oracy as pillar of primary literacy; primary only.
<b>England<sup>66</sup></b>	Spoken language in primary English aims; 12 statutory requirements, Years 1–6. Less detailed than	Spoken language endorsement reported separately; <b>does not contribute to grade</b>	Primary oracy framework and combined secondary oracy, reading and writing framework <b>announced Nov</b>

<sup>65</sup> CCEA, 'The Northern Ireland Curriculum: primary' (2007) and CCEA, '[GCSE English Language specification](#)' (2017)

<sup>66</sup> UK Department for Education, '[National curriculum in England: English programmes of study](#)' (2014) and Curriculum and Assessment Review, '[Building a world-class curriculum for all: final report.](#)' (2025) and UK Department for Education, '[Government response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review](#)' (2025)

Jurisdiction	Curriculum status of oracy	GCSE / terminal assessment	National oracy framework or strategy
	reading/writing; no progression pathway.		<b>2025</b> ; for first teaching Sept 2028.
<b>Scotland</b> <sup>67</sup>	'Listening and Talking' is a core strand of Literacy and English in Curriculum for Excellence. Experiences and Outcomes from early level to fourth level.	National 5 English includes spoken language component; <b>internally assessed</b> , externally verified by SQA.	<b>No dedicated framework</b> ; no shared progression guidance. Practice varies widely between schools.
<b>Wales</b> <sup>68</sup>	Oracy is a mandatory cross-curricular skill within Curriculum for Wales (phased rollout from Sept 2022). Progression descriptors for speaking, listening, collaboration and discussion.	WJEC GCSE English Language includes speaking and listening; <b>contributes to overall grade</b>	Skills Framework and Curriculum for Wales provide progression expectations. Welsh Government commissioned Oracy Cambridge evidence review (2018).

<sup>67</sup> Education Scotland, '[Curriculum for Excellence: literacy and English](#) — experiences and outcomes' (2009) and SQA, 'National 5 English: course specification' (2017)

<sup>68</sup> Welsh Government, '[Curriculum for Wales framework](#)' (2022) and Welsh Joint Education Committee, 'GCSE English Language specification.' (2017)

Jurisdiction	Curriculum status of oracy	GCSE / terminal assessment	National oracy framework or strategy
<b>Republic of Ireland<sup>69</sup></b>	Oral language (English) and Teanga ó Bhéal (Irish) are strands in the Primary Language Curriculum, with detailed learning outcomes and progression for all year groups. Same structure applies across English-medium, Irish-medium, and special schools.	Oral communication <b>internally assessed</b> in Junior Cycle English and Junior Cycle Irish (L1 and L2). Leaving Certificate Irish/Modern Foreign Language orals worth 40%. Leaving Certificate English oral proposed (2025). <b>Varies by subject</b>	Primary Language Curriculum (2019) provides an explicit oral language framework with progression milestones for both English and Irish. No equivalent secondary-level standalone framework.

<sup>69</sup> NCCA, '[Specification for Junior Cycle English](#)' (2015) and NCCA, '[Primary Language Curriculum](#)' (2019) and NCCA, '[Draft curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate English](#)' (2025) and Dáil Éireann Department of Education, '[Enactment of the Primary Language Curriculum: a focus on Irish](#)' (2025)

## 6 Conclusion

While spoken language has been featured within the Northern Ireland Curriculum, recent policy developments suggest increasing system-level attention to oracy as a distinct area of educational practice. This paper has sought to set out the current evidence base and contextual considerations relevant to oracy education in Northern Ireland.

The evidence reviewed in this paper indicates that structured oracy education is associated with gains in attainment, particularly at primary level and among disadvantaged pupils. Communication skills are consistently identified by employers as among the most important attributes in prospective employees, and research links the competences developed through structured classroom dialogue to those required for civic participation.

Teacher training is identified as an important factor for the effectiveness of oracy education. While the evidence base for oracy education is substantial at primary level, it is less developed at secondary level and does not yet extend to longitudinal tracking of outcomes beyond school. There is a paucity of research about oracy specific to Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's current position in relation to oracy provision is mixed. The CCEA GCSE English Language specification assigns spoken language a 20% weighting that contributes to the overall grade, a stronger formal assessment position than in England or Scotland. The TransformED Literacy Framework, launched in December 2025, names oracy as a pillar of primary literacy. However, the framework covers primary education only. There is no post-primary equivalent or standalone oracy strategy.

The paper has also highlighted contextual factors relevant to oracy education in Northern Ireland. Evidence on speech, language and communication needs suggests that a significant proportion of children enter school with delayed language development. Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study found that 68% of five-year-olds in Northern Ireland who had experienced persistent poverty were below the average vocabulary level. Northern Ireland currently

lacks a region-specific universal assessment tool for speech, language and communication at school entry and has no commissioned speech and language therapy posts in post-primary settings.

In addition, the linguistic landscape of Northern Ireland's school population is increasingly diverse. In 2025/26, over 21,000 pupils were identified as newcomers, while more than 7,800 pupils were enrolled in Irish-medium education. Pupils therefore experience schooling through a range of linguistic pathways, and spoken language plays differing roles in curriculum access and participation across these contexts. These varying experiences and needs of pupils will have implications for approaches to oracy education in Northern Ireland.