

New Report Reveals Great British Speaking Gap is Barrier to Social Mobility

6 months ago



Social mobility is being hampered, according to a new report that has found the majority of Britons have not had training around public speaking, listening or communication. The report, commissioned by [Compass Group UK&I](#) with polling conducted by More in Common, finds that nearly two thirds (64%) have not had dedicated oracy* training. Despite this, an overwhelming majority (87%) in the UK believe that strong oracy skills are important for career progression and leadership.

The report finds a clear difference in access to oracy based on socio-economic background.

- Just over a half (51%) of individuals from the most well-off backgrounds have had training or development opportunities around oracy, compared to just one in 10 (10%) of people from the least advantaged backgrounds.
- Based on current professions, people from higher managerial roles are more than twice as likely to have had workplace training (51%) compared to casual workers (20%), semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (19%) and people in supervisory or clerical and junior managerial roles (24%).

The UK Government recently announced oracy would be integrated into the curriculum. It comes as Compass Group UK&I's research finds that trends in the workplace are mirrored in education.

- Nearly two thirds (64%) of people from the most well-off backgrounds had either dedicated teaching or a significant emphasis on oracy skills at school.
- This compares with under a quarter (23%) of people from the least advantaged backgrounds.

There is also a gap in access according to gender.

- Men are more likely than women to have had public speaking training (45% vs 39% of women) and to have received oracy development opportunities at school (39% vs 33%).
- Men were also more likely to say that expressing themselves comes naturally (20% vs 15%), while women are more likely to have had active listening training (54% vs 43% of men).

Britons expressed a preference for training programmes dedicated to oracy (36%) to improve communication skills, according to the report. This is followed by active listening training (29%) and public speaking opportunities (19%).

Compass' research includes a series of recommendations for government and employers, so that everyone has the opportunity to learn and improve their verbal communication skills.

These include:

For Government

- Expand the focus on oracy beyond schools
- Provide practical resources for employers
- Appoint a workplace oracy champion

For Employers

- Guarantee at least one oracy training opportunity for every employee
- Embed oracy into apprenticeships and T Levels
- Support programmes in deprived areas

Sophie Smith, Chief People Officer, Compass Group UK&I said: "The ability to articulate and communicate effectively is a skill that is fundamental for all people. From front line customer service to the corporate office, strong communication skills help to improve confidence, performance and progression for individuals within the workplace.

It is of great concern that people from more disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have accessed this training, making oracy skill development a key social mobility driver. At Compass, we are passionate about creating opportunities for all. Oracy skills are key to this in so many ways. We encourage the whole business community to provide opportunities for oracy training for all staff, to help drive business growth, career progression and social mobility. We believe that by adopting these simple steps, it is possible to positively change the lives of many people."

Kate Nicholls, Chair of UKHospitality commented: "Communication in a hospitality venue is an essential skill. Whether it's communicating in a busy kitchen team or providing fantastic front-of-house service, oracy skills are a must. We support Compass' calls to expand the focus on oracy to include the workplace,

and give both teams and employers the tools they need to develop our skills even further.”

Since the launch of Our Social Promise in 2021, Compass has supported over 500,000 people, both within and outside the organisation, enhancing employment opportunities and changing lives through job creation, education, training, and community engagement. Compass is committed to further evolving its mission to make an even greater impact. Building on the lessons it has learnt over the past four years, the company is expanding its flagship social mobility programme with ‘Mission to a Million: Forward Together’, which has improving socio-economic outcomes as the guiding principle.