



Leeds Trinity
University

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Law Debating: Pre-16 Oracy Skills

Intermediate Outcomes Evaluation, 2024-25

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INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES, 2024-25

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Executive Summary

This evaluation report provides an assessment of intermediate outcomes for the 2024/25 delivery of Leeds Trinity's Law Debating project. The project aims to support the development of oracy skills in targeted KS4 pupils, through in-school workshops and an on-campus Law debate day.

- All participating pupils showed development in one or more areas of confidence, cognitive, and/or physical oracy.
- 61% of pupils indicated an increase of 4+ points in one or more areas of confidence, cognitive, and/or physical oracy (10-point scale rating knowledge or confidence).
- Communication knowledge and skills were more frequently rated by pupils as areas of positive development and saw greater gains than for communication and speaking confidence.
- 78% of pupils attending the debate day were rated by their teachers as showing a visible increase in confidence over the day.
- 98% of pupils attending the debate day met targeting criteria of receiving free school meals and/or being considered borderline to achieve a grade 4 or 5 in GCSE English.

The Law Debating project is judged to have achieved its intended intermediate outcomes, but further evaluation is needed to determine whether these lead to longer-term outcomes, including pupil attainment in GCSE English. This evaluation, and a more in-depth qualitative assessment of changes in pupil confidence and skills is planned for summer 2026. The Law Debating project will run again in the 2025/26 academic year, maintaining the same scale.

Introduction

The Law Debating project forms part of Leeds Trinity's 2024-25 to 2026-27 Access and Participation Plan commitments to supporting attainment in school for young people that experience high levels of intersectional disadvantage. The project was developed following consultation with teachers in Leeds Trinity partner schools, who highlighted a need to support young people with skills that could support GCSE English attainment.

Oracy skills have been highlighted as crucial in children's development, both to engage with education and to support citizenship and civic empowerment (Oracy Education Commission, 2024). There is a range of evidence that using oracy skills in the classroom and dialogic teaching approaches can improve pupil engagement and reinforce learning (EEF, 2017; EEF, 2021). The value of oracy in learning is reflected in many schools choosing to adopt oracy-focused approaches and recent developments to create a primary and combined secondary oracy framework (DFE, 2025). The Law Debating Project is intended to trial oracy training for pupils, combined with an opportunity to practice oracy skills in a higher education context, to explore whether this is beneficial for attainment in GCSE English, particularly for those pupils at risk of not obtaining a level 4 or 5 grade.

This report covers delivery of the project in the 2024-2025 academic year and initial evaluation. As pupils are in year 10 at the time of project delivery, details of longer-term outcomes, including GCSE results, are not yet available. A more detailed report will be published once results are available and analysed.

Project Overview

The Law Debating project involves selected year 10 pupils participating in two in-school workshops focused on oral communication, presentation, and debate. These are delivered to a whole class group of pupils who may be at risk of not achieving a grade 5 in GCSE English. A subset of 10-15 pupils is then selected by their schools to attend a debate competition, hosted by Leeds Trinity. The debate makes use of Leeds Trinity's moot court and involves staff and students from Law programmes. This provides students with an insight into how the skills they have developed might be applied in a higher education or professional context. Schools are asked to select pupils for the debate based on:

- Eligibility for free school meals
- Being considered 'borderline' for achieving grade 5 in GCSE English

Schools may also use their discretion in selecting pupils who may also face disadvantage in terms of HE progression, including having a statement of additional needs, disability or extended period of absence from school.

Participating schools are all state secondary schools within the Leeds City Region, with prior relationships directly with LTU or with post-16 provision where there is a strong link to LTU. Schools in areas of deprivation (IMD) and/or with higher than national average proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals are prioritised.

The project was piloted in 2023-24 academic year, with five schools participating. A total of 121 pupils took part in workshops, and 51 pupils attended the debate day. Based on

feedback and analysis from the pilot, additional targeting guidance was provided to schools, and virtual briefings were added to support schools in preparing for the debate day.

Aims

The project aims to support participant development in three areas:

- oracy skills across domains of confidence, cognitive and physical oracy
- confidence in relation to skills assessed during the activities (e.g. structuring an argument)
- subject-relevant knowledge and/or skills for GCSE English

It is hoped that this development, alongside raising awareness of HE and providing a positive experience of an HE environment, could support GCSE attainment and, longer-term, HE progression for participants.

2024-2025 Delivery

Four schools participated in the Law Debating Project in 2024-25. A total of nine schools were approached, including the five who participated in 2023-24, but internal staffing pressures and timescales meant that engagement was challenging for many. The schools have been anonymised for the purpose of this report.

Note: FSM data has been presented for the year of delivery, but schools were prioritised based on 23/24 figures, which were available at the time of school selection.

	Participated 2023-24	FSMEver6 24/25	Workshop 1 pupils	Workshop 2 pupils	Debate pupils	Debate pupils receiving FSM
School A	No	17.5%	26	19	10	6
School B	Yes	28.6%	31	28	15	12
School C	Yes	40.6%	26	16	14	14
School D	Yes	25.3%	26	24	12	12

TABLE 1: SCHOOL AND PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Where debate pupils did not meet the criteria of receiving FSM, they were confirmed to meet the criteria of being a borderline GCSE student, with the exception on one pupil from school C. This pupil was selected by the school as they felt participating would be a boost to her confidence.

The structure of the programme is shown below. Workshops were delivered in school by Talk the Talk, a third sector organisation and specialist in oracy development and communication training.

January & February 2025	March 2025	April & May 2025	June 2025
Workshop one delivered in schools	Workshop two	Virtual briefings (x2) for debate teams.	Debate day at Leeds Trinity

TABLE 2: PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

Two workshops were selected that align with the aims of the Law Debating project:

Workshop one: Full-day workshop, during which students speak in front of their peers a minimum of three times, while learning core components of visual, vocal and verbal communication. This workshop supports the National Curriculum Spoken Language and Citizenship for Key Stage 4 and provides valuable preparation for English Speaking and Listening Assessments.

Workshop two: This full-day workshop builds on the visual, vocal and verbal communication skills covered in workshop one, with a focus on 'group talk' and practical scenarios around employment and group work. Pupils also focus on skills relevant to negotiation, planning and debate.

These in-school workshops provide participants with experience of applying the PEEEP (Position, Explain, Example, Expand, Position) structure in a speech. This same structure is then used in the Leeds Trinity debate day to assess pupil performance.

Following the workshops, each school chose a smaller group of pupils (10-15) to participate in the debate day at Leeds Trinity. These smaller groups received two online briefing sessions prior to the day. The first briefing focused on introducing the motions for debate, and the second allowed space for each team to ask questions and receive feedback on their preparation. Each school used these briefing sessions differently, with some opting to deliver a rehearsal of their arguments and others asking questions about the structure of the day.

On the debate day, pupils spent several hours at the university, supported by university staff and student ambassadors. Debates took place in the university's moot court, judged by two university staff and a student from the school of Law. This experience is intended to provide pupils with an opportunity to practice their developed oracy skills in a supportive and authentic higher education setting. When not in a debate session or preparing for one, pupils had the opportunity to complete a workbook of activities themed around higher education progression and also took part in a campus tour. The day concluded with a prize ceremony, announcing the winners of the debates and the overall winning school.

Evaluation Design

This evaluation design has drawn on the abbreviated theory of change in appendix i to identify intermediate and long-term outcomes for participants and suitable measures for these. The evaluation is designed with reference to Leeds Trinity's evaluation principles of proportionality, equity and ethical practice.

In the short term, the project aims to develop pupil confidence and competency in physical and cognitive oracy skills. All pupils who take part in in-school workshops are expected to develop in these skills. For long-term outcomes related to GCSE English attainment and progress in school, we will focus on those who attended the LTU debate day, as this additional activity aims to reinforce these skills and pupil confidence, through practice and interaction with peers and the university environment.

Methods

This evaluation uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to assess outcomes. Intermediate outcomes are measured by a combination of pupil self-assessment during workshops, used by Talk the Talk, and teacher and judges' assessments of confidence and competency made during the debate day. Longer-term outcomes are measured by changes in pupil predicted GCSE English grades, final GCSE English grades, and teacher interview. Details of each method and which of these are included in this evaluation report are detailed in the table below.

Evaluation Activity	Details	Assessing	Status
Student self-assessment (talk the talk workshops)	Pre and post workshop self-assessments of knowledge and confidence for each participant (10-point scale)	Changes in knowledge and confidence after workshop (individual change and group average)	Included in this evaluation report
Teacher assessment of student confidence (Debate Day)	Teacher assessment of student confidence (3-point scale) at key points (arrival, before debate, after debate) throughout the day.	Change in student confidence throughout debate day (individual change)	Included in this evaluation report
Debate scores	Judges' assessments of application of debate skills (as taught within workshops), taken on debate day.	Application of learning (team level)	Included in this evaluation report
Pupil Reflections (debate day)	Pupil qualitative reflections on a) their achievements, b) what to do better next time c) compliment from another participant. Written exercise at the end of the day.	Pupil skills, confidence, and/or knowledge development	Included in this evaluation report
Teacher Reflections (academic year after delivery)	Brief interview with nominated teacher from the school, focusing on appropriateness of targeting, skills development of pupils, relevance of development to pupil attainment. To happen in Y11 for the relevant cohort.	Relevance of skills development to pupil attainment	Not yet available
Participant Outcomes	Predicated GCSE English grades before and after participation in project. GCSE English grade, including breakdown by domain where available.	Changes in expected attainment (individual) GCSE English attainment (individual)	Not yet available

TABLE 3: EVALUATION METHODS

Evaluation Outcomes

This report focuses on the following intermediate outcomes:

- Participants and teaching staff feel that the speaking confidence of participants has improved
- Participants feel that they better understand the skills needed to communicate effectively and persuasively
- Participants feel more confident in being able to communicate in front of others, including persuasion and sharing their ideas

The following sections outline data gathered from pupils and staff to assess whether these outcomes have been achieved. A future report will revisit these alongside the long-term outcomes of the project.

Pupil Assessments

Talk the Talk assess pupil progress in workshops using a pupil self-assessment scale. Pupils are asked to rate themselves on a 10-point scale in relation to three questions before and after the training day. Results from these questions are presented below, both in terms of average development and the proportion of pupils indicating progress. Leeds Trinity’s aim is that all participants make some progress over the course of the programme, recognising that this will be different for pupils dependent on their starting point.

		School A	School B	School C	School D
How confident do you feel speaking in front of other people?	Before	4.4	4.7	3.8	5.7
	After	7	6.6	6.3	6.8
	Change	+2.6	+1.9	+2.5	+1.1
Do you know what skills are needed to communicate effectively in front of others?	Before	4.3	5.4	4.6	5.1
	After	8.1	8.9	7.1	8.1
	Change	+3.8	+3.5	+2.5	+3
How confident do you feel about giving your final talk in front of the group?	Before	4.1	5.8	4.9	5
	After	7	7.2	7.2	7.2
	Change	+2.9	+1.4	+2.3	+2.2
Percentage of respondents rating themselves as making progress in one or more domains		100%	100%	93%	100%
Percentage of respondents rating themselves as making 4+ progress in one or more domains		83%	65%	47%	50%

TABLE 4: TALK ABOUT COMMUNICATION – PUPIL SELF-ASSESSMENTS

Most participants indicated greater confidence and/or knowledge in relation to their communication skills following their first workshop. One participant (School C) did not feel that they had developed in any area but did make progress across every area during their second workshop and was chosen to attend the debate on campus. During the on-campus

event, their teacher assessed the confidence of this pupil as increasing over the course of the day.

		School A	School B	School C	School D
How confident do you feel speaking in front of other people?	Before	7.3	6.5	6.1	5.5
	After	8.7	7.5	7.8	7.1
	Change	+1.4	+1	+1.7	+1.6
How confident would you feel in persuading others to consider your opinion in a group?	Before	6.9	6.6	5.1	5.3
	After	8.3	7.6	6.9	6.7
	Change	+1.4	+1	+1.8	+1.4
Do you know what skills are needed to talk persuasively and get your opinions across?	Before	6.3	5.6	5.9	5.1
	After	8.2	7.8	8	7
	Change	+1.9	+2.2	+2.1	+1.9
Percentage of respondents rating themselves as making progress in one or more domains		94%	100%	87%	100%
Percentage of respondents rating themselves as making 4+ progress in one or more domains		11%	15%	25%	13%

TABLE 5: TALK ABOUT COMMUNICATION PLUS – PUPIL SELF-ASSESSMENTS

In the second workshop, a lower proportion of participants record making over 4 points of progress, however pupils had a higher average starting point, making this level of progress less likely.

Across both workshops, knowledge and skills were the areas where most students recorded an increase (95% of respondents in workshop one and 87% of respondents in workshop two), with a lower proportion of students recording increases in their confidence to speak and persuade. Viewing pupil responses across both workshops, 100% of participants made progress in at least one area.

During the on-campus event, attending pupils were asked to reflect and record one achievement from their debate, one thing they would like to improve, and to ask a fellow participant to provide them with one piece of positive feedback. These brief reflective comments show that pupils were particularly happy with the clarity of their speech and speaking more than they anticipated or usually would. Feedback from other pupils focused on their strengths in demonstrating their knowledge and speaking well. Most pupils wanted to speak more or to be more confident, though this appeared to be a mix of wanting to feel more confident and demonstrating confidence through their actions in the debate. In general, comments on areas of improvement were positive in suggesting actions they wanted to do more of, rather than actions they felt were lacking or they had not done.

Pupil assessments of their learning above indicate that participants feel that they have developed in their understanding of the skills needed to communicate effectively and persuasively. There are also indications that participants feel more confident in these skills and being able to demonstrate these in front of others, even though, for some pupils, they may wish to develop this confidence further.

Staff Assessments

During the day of the on-campus debate, pupils are assessed through scoring of each debate by LTU staff, and through accompanying school staff rating the confidence of each pupil on arrival, before their first debate, and after debating is complete.

Pupils participated in at least one debate during the day, with some participating in two debates where there were fewer attending pupils from their school. Performance in the debate was assessed by three Leeds Trinity 'judges', based on speech structure, argument content, and communication skills. Scores were on a scale of 0-5 for each domain and were based on team performance. No debate team scored lower than 3/5 for any domain.

Throughout the day, an accompanying staff member for each school was asked to provide an assessment of how confident, based on their experience of working with them, each pupil appeared at arrival, just before, and after debates took place. This assessment used a 3-point scale.

	Overall	School A	School B	School C	School D
Proportion of pupils assessed as increasing in confidence during the day	78%	100%	80%	71%	67%

TABLE 6: TEACHER ASSESSED CONFIDENCE

Where teachers did not assess pupils as having an increase in confidence, this was, in most cases, due to pupils remaining static at a level 2 throughout the day. No pupil ended the day lower than a level 2 rating.

Both staff and pupil assessments indicate that pupils have grown in their speaking confidence whilst participating in activities and are able to successfully demonstrate this in an assessed setting. Although progress is not uniform for all pupils, all participants demonstrated increases in at least one area of self-assessment and/or staff assessment.

Further Evaluation

The results above indicate that the Law Debating Project has been successful in its intermediate aims, based on qualitative assessments made by pupils and staff. Further evaluation is needed to understand whether these qualitative assessments result in persistent changes in application of skills and positive outcomes in GCSE English assessment. These changes will be assessed when participants complete year 11 in summer 2026, through measuring participant GCSE English outcomes and interviews with school staff.

References

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Appendix i: Abbreviated theory of change

