



HOUSE OF LORDS

Communications and Digital Committee

3rd Report of Session 2024–25

Media literacy

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Q in footnotes refers to a question in oral evidence.

SUMMARY

Social cohesion is at risk and democracy itself is threatened by inadequate media literacy. Being media literate—having the skills to think critically about the content we create and consume, both online and offline—is essential. Media literacy builds resilience, empowers individuals and protects them against harmful and misleading content. It enables them to be informed and responsible citizens.

Yet the UK is losing ground in equipping people to navigate an increasingly complex and diverse media and information environment adequately. Despite the growing importance of media literacy skills, the UK has dropped down in international indices. Ofcom evidence shows little improvement in key media literacy skills over the last six years.

This issue is urgent. The World Economic Forum has identified misinformation and disinformation as the top short-term global risk for the last two years. Earlier this year, the Netflix drama *Adolescence* exposed just how little adults, and parents in particular, know about the information young people consume online.

The Government and Ofcom have failed to meet the mounting scale of the challenge. Past initiatives have been scattered across departments, with limited join-up and no long-term strategic vision. Ofcom's work in this area and its three-year strategy are valuable contributions. But Ofcom cannot deliver a comprehensive media literacy programme across the UK.

Government leadership, driven by a specific, senior minister, is essential to translate the regulator's research on 'what works' into a more sustained, nationwide offering.

Children and young people need to be educated to question media content and make informed judgements about what to trust. But media literacy is not properly embedded in the national curriculum, making good provision a 'postcode lottery'. At present, media literacy is often relegated to optional subjects, taught in one-off assemblies or is absent from school altogether. Many teachers lack the skills and confidence to deliver media literacy training to pupils.

Outside the classroom, provision for both adults and children is patchy and typically relies on underfunded third-sector organisations. Engaging adults in media literacy education is vital, yet challenging. Adults are time-poor, lack awareness of media literacy and often overestimate their skills in this area. Libraries and other public services provide vital opportunities for informal media literacy support, but these are already overstretched and under-resourced.

Technology platforms, which exert so much influence over the information we consume, have no formal obligation to support media literacy. Ofcom's best practice principles fail even to set minimum standards for on-platform media literacy interventions. Words of encouragement from Ofcom and the Government will be insufficient to drive meaningful change. Technology firms must be held to account and play a greater part in funding independent efforts to enhance media literacy skills.

The Government's intention to incorporate media literacy into its work on digital inclusion is welcome, provided it does not become sidelined in this

broader work. The action plan includes several ingredients for potential success: ministerial buy-in, cross-departmental collaboration, local delivery and sector expertise. But sustained focus on media literacy, coupled with specific reporting on this area, is needed as well to ensure that vital critical thinking skills are developed under the plan.

Getting this right will take coordination, commitment and political will. We recommend the following:

- **Embed media literacy across the national curriculum:** Schools are central to delivering media literacy education to children and young people. But current provision in formal education is inadequate. We urge the Government to use the curriculum and assessment review to embed media literacy across the curriculum. Learning should start from the early years phase. Media literacy should be included in initial teacher training. Training and resources must be updated regularly to support teachers with the skills and confidence they need to deliver media literacy education effectively.
- **Impose a levy on technology companies:** This should provide long-term, sustainable funding to independent media literacy efforts. Ofcom must also set out minimum standards for platforms' media literacy activity and use its wider powers to understand better how effective these activities are.
- **Address the leadership vacuum on media literacy delivery:** The Government must appoint a specific senior minister to drive the delivery of Ofcom's media literacy strategy across Whitehall by coordinating cross-departmental activity within education, public services and local government.
- **Raise public awareness and target support for adults:** A public awareness campaign with simple messaging is needed to boost public understanding of the importance of media literacy. This must be accompanied by clear signposting to further resources, year-long media literacy activity and support for local delivery partners. In particular, parents need targeted resources to help them reinforce media literacy education at home while improving their own skills in this area.

Media literacy

CHAPTER 1: THE CHALLENGE

1. This inquiry follows a series of House of Lords select committee reports that have highlighted problems associated with poor media literacy. Publishing its report *Digital Technology and the Resurrection of Trust* amid the COVID-19 crisis, the House of Lords Democracy and Digital Technologies Committee warned of a parallel “pandemic of misinformation and disinformation”.¹ It concluded that media literacy skills were needed “to secure democracy” and recommended that these skills be embedded in the national curriculum.
2. We have emphasised the importance of media literacy in several of our own inquiries, including our work on the future of journalism² and freedom of expression online.³ More recently, our 2024 report on the future of news warned that “the period of having informed citizens with a shared understanding of facts is not inevitable and may not endure”.⁴
3. We concluded in that report that “media literacy initiatives remain a key way to improve societal resilience” against a backdrop of rising news avoidance; the growing influence of online intermediaries; and the increasing prevalence of generative AI.⁵ However, we were not clear that the Government had an adequate plan to tackle the issues facing the UK’s media literacy sector, and we had concerns about Ofcom being left to carry this burden. That report also recommended that the Department for Education use its curriculum and assessment review to ensure that media literacy is given more time and prominence in schools.⁶
4. With the curriculum and assessment review ongoing and in a period of transition for the UK’s media literacy sector, with the end of the previous Government’s 2021–24 online media literacy strategy⁷ and the recent launch of Ofcom’s three-year media literacy strategy,⁸ the Committee decided that this topic now merited an inquiry of its own. Our focus on media literacy also complements the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee’s recent work on social media, misinformation and

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- 1 Select Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies, *Digital Technology and the Resurrection of Trust* (Report of Session 2019–21, HL Paper 77), p 4. The UK Government defines misinformation as “the inadvertent sharing of false information”. Disinformation is “the deliberate creation and/or sharing of false or manipulated information with the intention to deceive or mislead audiences.” HM Government, *Online Media Literacy Report* (July 2021), p 64: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f6a632d3bf7f56867df4e1/DCMS_Media_Literacy_Report_Roll_Out_Accessible_PDF.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]
 - 2 Communications and Digital Committee, *Breaking news? The future of UK journalism* (1st Report, Session 2019–21, HL Paper 176)
 - 3 Communications and Digital Committee, *Free for all? Freedom of expression in the digital age* (1st Report, Session 2021–22, HL Paper 54)
 - 4 Communications and Digital Committee, *The future of news* (1st Report, Session 2024–25, HL Paper 39), p 3
 - 5 *The future of news*, para 185
 - 6 *The future of news*, para 192
 - 7 See Box 2
 - 8 See Box 4

harmful algorithms, which investigated the relationship between platforms' algorithms, generative AI and the spread of false or harmful content.⁹

5. In our present inquiry, we sought to establish a clear vision for what good media literacy should look like in the UK and to examine the barriers to achieving this vision. We set out to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Government, the technology and media industries and regulators in advancing media literacy and to assess the extent to which each sector is currently fulfilling its duties. Finally, we aimed to identify and prioritise the key actions required to enhance media literacy skills across the population.
6. Following the launch of our inquiry in March 2025, the Committee held 12 evidence sessions, hearing from 33 witnesses, including technology companies (Google, Roblox and TikTok), charities and academics. We also received 57 pieces of written evidence. In June, a delegation from the Committee visited St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in London and discussed media literacy education with pupils, teachers and parents. Another highlight of our inquiry was the roundtable meeting we held with members of the Youth Select Committee¹⁰ in May, during which we discussed the findings on media literacy included in its recent report on social media and youth violence.¹¹ Notes from the roundtable session and visit are included in Appendix 4 and 5 of this report. We are extremely grateful to everyone who contributed to our work.
7. Our report focuses on the following issues:
 - Chapter 2 examines trends in the media and information environment and the need to improve UK media literacy;
 - Chapter 3 examines the role of the Government and Ofcom in relation to media literacy;
 - Chapter 4 examines the contributions of online platforms and the media industry to work in this area;
 - Chapter 5 examines how to improve the media literacy skills of UK adults; and
 - Chapter 6 examines options for improving children and young people's media literacy.

9 Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, *Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms* (Second Report of Session 2024–25, HC 441)

10 The Youth Select Committee is an initiative run by the National Youth Agency, supported by the House of Commons. The committee is made up of 12 members aged 14–18 who represent young people across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. UK Parliament, 'Get Involved with the Youth Select Committee': <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/education-programmes/youth-select-committee/>

11 Youth Select Committee, *Youth Violence and Social Media* (2024): <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/hc-999-youth-violence-and-social-media-online.pdf>

CHAPTER 2: THE CASE FOR ACTION

8. The media landscape has undergone a significant transformation in recent years.¹² The first part of this chapter notes some particularly impactful trends. The second part makes the case for enhancing media literacy skills in the UK.

An evolving information environment

9. There is now an “ever-expanding amount of content available” for audiences to consume.¹³ The way they access media and information is changing too: according to figures from Ofcom, 71 per cent of UK adults now consume their news online and 52 per cent do so through social media, up from 47 per cent in 2023. TikTok and YouTube are the most-used individual news sources by 12–15 year-olds.¹⁴
10. The shift to consumption via online platforms “has a direct impact on the quality of information people access”, since their algorithms rank content primarily according to user engagement. As such, “official government accounts and news media are presented as equal information producers as private citizens, private companies, or even automated ‘bots’.”¹⁵ Research from Ofcom identified concerns that:

“People who most often use social media to access news are less likely to correctly identify important factual information, feel more antipathy towards people who hold different political views and are less trusting of democratic institutions, than people who use TV and newspapers most often as a source of news.”¹⁶

Ofcom’s latest media literacy tracker found that almost half (49 per cent) of adults using social media say they have come across a news story that is misleading or untrue this year.¹⁷

11. The trend is also “further diminishing the influence of ‘institutional journalism’ and supercharging a fragmented alternative media environment containing an array of podcasters, YouTubers, and TikTokers.”¹⁸ Among UK 13–27 year-olds, posts from online influencers are trusted “as much as—and sometimes more than—established journalism.” One-third of this age group trust alternative internet-based media personalities, compared to 12 per cent of adults aged 28 to 65.¹⁹

12 *The future of news*, para 28

13 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

14 Ofcom, *News consumption in the UK 2024* (September 2024), pp 4, 6, 10: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand-research/tv-research/news/news-consumption-2024/news-consumption-in-the-uk-2024-report.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

15 Demos, *Epistemic Security 2029* (February 2025), pp 13–14: https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Epistemic-Security-2029_accessible.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

16 Ofcom, *Online news: Research update* (March 2024), p 3: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/multi-sector/media-plurality/2024/0324-online-news-research-update.pdf> [accessed 3 July 2025]

17 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

18 Reuters Institute, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (June 2025), p 10: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/Digital_News-Report_2025.pdf [accessed 16 June 2025]

19 Channel 4, *Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust* (January 2025), p 1: <https://assets-corporate.channel4.com/flysystem/s3/2025-01/Channel%204%20-%20Gen%20Z%20Truth%20Trust%20and%20Trends%20-%20SUMMARY%20AND%20CALL%20TO%20ACTION%20-%20FINAL%201.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

12. In addition, the digital media environment is “becoming increasingly fractured along ideological lines”.²⁰ Recommender algorithms and AI-driven personalisation mean individuals may find themselves funnelled into ‘echo chambers’ or ‘filter bubbles’ that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints;²¹ only 22 per cent of adults surveyed by Ofcom in 2024 reported seeing views they disagreed with “often” on their social media feeds.²² These can also increase the likelihood of users engaging with misleading or harmful content, including misinformation, misogyny or AI-generated deepfakes.²³ In April 2025, Ofcom’s annual qualitative Adults Media Lives study observed that “attitudes towards news have become more polarised” in the past year.²⁴
13. Social media, algorithms and misinformation are linked.²⁵ Misinformation and disinformation have been identified as a top short-term risk in the World Economic Forum’s Global Risk Report for two consecutive years.²⁶ Professor Sander van der Linden, Professor of Social Psychology in Society at the University of Cambridge, described how misinformation “can be dangerous for people’s personal health, but it can also undermine democratic processes and elections ... eroding trust in each other, in the media, in democratic institutions.”²⁷
14. The growing prevalence of AI in search services, as well as AI-enabled recommendations and chatbots across social media and websites, is another factor.²⁸ We heard that AI-generated news summaries contain factual inaccuracies and that use of these “directly increases the risks of users being exposed to mis and disinformation”.²⁹ A recent report from fact-checking charity Full Fact described an “online misinformation crisis”, exacerbated by the proliferation of AI-generated content.³⁰
15. Dr Mhairi Aitken, Senior Ethics Fellow at The Alan Turing Institute, warned of further risks stemming from this trend:

“The deeper threat here is that increasingly, as there is exposure to and awareness of AI-generated content, people begin to lose trust in all content online. It is not just that we might see or hear something fake and believe that it is real. Increasingly, people will see and hear things that are real and the first reaction might be, “How do I know that is not

20 Written evidence from Shout Out UK (MLI0031)

21 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster (MLI0012), Shout Out UK (MLI0031). See also Ofcom, *Future Technology and Media Literacy: Applications of Generative AI* (November 2024), pp 9–11: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/future-technology-trends-and-media-literacy/future-technology-and-media-lit-applications-of-generative-ai.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

22 Ofcom, *Adults’ Media Use and Attitudes Report* (May 2025), p 13: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/adults/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-2025/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025.pdf> [accessed 3 July 2025]

23 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster (MLI0012)

24 Ofcom, *Adults’ Media Lives* (April 2025), p 45: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/adults/adults-media-lives-2025/adults-media-lives-2025-a-qualitative-study-wave-20.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

25 *Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms*, pp 15–16

26 World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2025* (January 2025), p 8: https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2025.pdf [accessed 16 July 2025]

27 Q 2 (Prof Sander van der Linden)

28 Written evidence from Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

29 Written evidence from Financial Times (MLI0051)

30 Full Fact, *Full Fact Report 2025* (May 2025), pp 8, 10: <https://fullfact.org/documents/393/full-fact-report-2025.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

fake? That could be AI generated”. It is a particular concern when what people are confronted with ... challenges existing ideological positions or political viewpoints that the initial response can be that it could be fake.”

In her view, this creates “the perfect breeding ground for conspiracy theories and for a wider erosion of trust in the information ecosystem”.³¹

16. Public trust in news and institutions is already low.³² Referencing data from the 2024 British Social Attitudes survey,³³ Hannah Perry, Associate Director, Information Ecosystems at Demos, noted that trust in government and politicians is “the lowest it has been in 50 years”.³⁴

The need for media literacy

17. Against this backdrop, the need for enhanced media literacy skills is urgent.³⁵ Will Gardner OBE, CEO of Childnet, told us: “Every year, people say this issue is more important than ever before, and this year it seems to be on a different scale”.³⁶ Chris Morris, CEO of Full Fact, described what is at stake:

“The consequence of not confronting the challenges ... is that we are in danger of reaching a place where nobody believes anything they read, see or hear anywhere and, therefore, of creating a world of enormous distrust, which is clearly not good for our democracy, for businesses in this country or for our idea of who we are as a society. Media literacy is absolutely fundamental to give strength to what I think we hold dear in our society.”³⁷

18. Stakeholders agreed that failure to act on media literacy would be detrimental to both individuals and democracy. Consequences include: increased exposure to harmful content;³⁸ the detrimental effects of health misinformation;³⁹ poor mental health;⁴⁰ reduced employability;⁴¹ social disintegration and polarisation;⁴² low trust in the media and institutions;⁴³ increased inequality and digital exclusion;⁴⁴ and greater vulnerability to

31 Q 2 (Dr Mhairi Aitken)

32 Q 80 (Dr Gianfranco Polizzi); Written evidence from IMPRESS (MLI0006), Frances Yeoman (MLI0013), Shout Out UK (MLI0031)

33 National Centre for Social Research, ‘British Social Attitudes 41, Damaged Politics?’ (12 June 2024): <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/british-social-attitudes-41-damaged-politics> [accessed 16 June 2025]

34 Q 53 (Hannah Perry)

35 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster (MLI0012), Voice of the Listener and Viewer (MLI0028), Shout Out UK (MLI0031), Ofcom (MLI0050), Financial Times (MLI0051)

36 Q 58 (Will Gardner)

37 Q 54 (Chris Morris)

38 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

39 Written evidence from Shout Out UK (MLI0031), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046), Full Fact (MLI0047)

40 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008), Prof Ruth Page, Dr Alex Christiansen, Michael Larkin, Dr Shioma-Lei Craythorne, Prof Paul Crawford, Emma Garavini and Eva Asiedu-Addo (MLI0015)

41 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

42 Written evidence from ConnectFutures (MLI0016), Tecola Smith (MLI0036)

43 Written evidence from Prof Julie Firmstone and Prof John Steel (MLI0019), Shout Out UK (MLI0031)

44 Written evidence from Sarah Pavey (MLI0021), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Salford Business School (MLI0027), National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

manipulation, including foreign interference.⁴⁵ Stakeholders cited the riots that took place in the summer of 2024 as an example of activity that can arise from poor media literacy.⁴⁶

19. While those with high media literacy skills are still capable of contributing to online harms,⁴⁷ positive individual and societal outcomes associated with increased media literacy include improved digital skills, better preparation for employment and enhanced democratic engagement.⁴⁸ As the National Literacy Trust put it:

“By fostering critical thinking, enhancing digital skills, promoting civic engagement, reducing disparities, and aligning education with workforce needs, media literacy initiatives can empower individuals to engage safely, responsibly, and effectively with media in all aspects of their lives”.⁴⁹

Media literacy levels in the UK

20. Despite the urgency of the situation, stakeholders warned that the UK has “fallen behind” other countries and is moving “in the wrong direction” in relation to media literacy.⁵⁰ The UK ranked 13th out of 41 countries in the Open Society Institute’s 2023 European Media Literacy Index,⁵¹ down from 11th and 10th in 2022⁵² and 2021⁵³ respectively. Evidence from Ofcom suggests “that there has been a lack of marked improvement in some of the key media literacy skills in the past six years”.⁵⁴
21. Full Fact told us that one in four UK adults finds it difficult to distinguish between true and false information, and that one in three had “falsely believed a news story was real until they found out it was fake”.⁵⁵ The Government noted that the Minimum Digital Living Standard, a framework developed by the Good Things Foundation, “reveals that 27 per cent of households with children have parents missing the critical skills for understanding and managing digital risks”.⁵⁶ Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Assistant Professor in Digital Media and Communications at the University of Birmingham, identified “massive gaps in critical thinking skills, which adults need in

45 Q 53 (Hannah Perry); Written evidence from Shout Out UK (MLI0031), Tecola Smith (MLI0036), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046), Media Education Association (MLI0038), WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

46 Written evidence from Shout Out UK (MLI0031), LSE (MLI0040), Internet Matters (MLI0039), François Nel (MLI0005)

47 University of Bournemouth, ‘Evaluating Media Literacy with a Theory of Change’ (May 2023), p 4: <https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/ToC-Guide-updated.pdf> [accessed 16 July 2025]

48 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Salford Business School (MLI0027), Wikimedia UK (MLI0017), Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MLI0033), Internet Matters (MLI0039), WISE KIDS (MLI0044), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

49 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

50 Written evidence from Parent Zone (MLI0014)

51 Open Society Institute Sofia, *The Media Literacy Index 2023* (June 2023), p 7: <https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MLI-report-in-English-22.06.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

52 Open Society Institute Sofia, *How It Started, How It is Going: Media Literacy Index 2022* (October 2022), p 9: https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/HowItStarted_MediaLiteracyIndex2022_ENG_.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

53 Open Society Institute Sofia, *Double Trouble: Resilience to Fake News at the Time of Covid-19 Infodemic* (March 2021), p 8: https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MediaLiteracyIndex2021_ENG.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

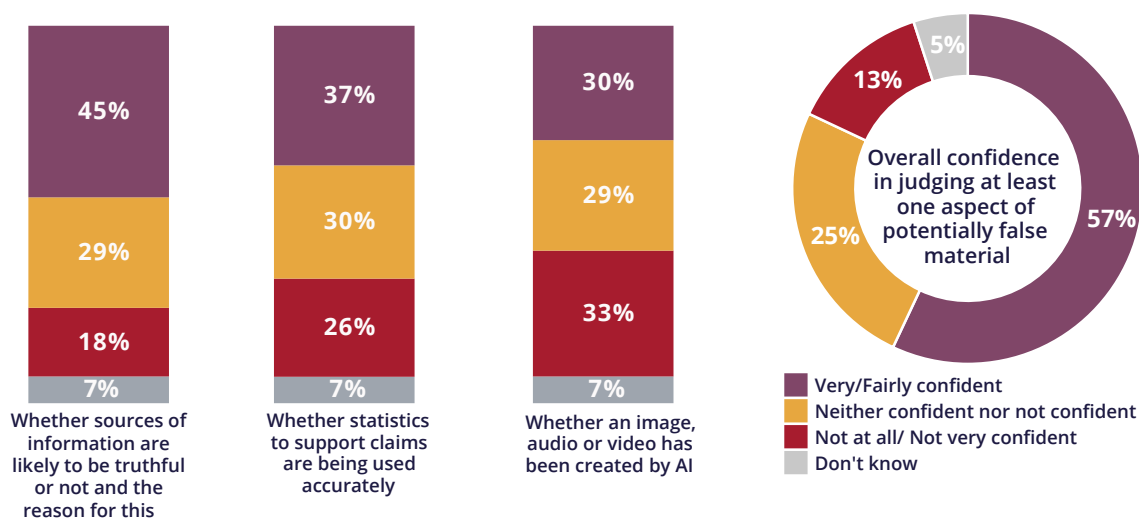
54 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

55 Written evidence from Full Fact (MLI0047)

56 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049)

order to evaluate content and information”,⁵⁷ citing a 2024 study by Ofcom that showed that only 45 per cent of UK adults felt confident judging the truthfulness of online sources, and just 30 per cent felt confident recognising AI-generated content.⁵⁸ Ofcom has also identified a discrepancy between adults’ confidence and abilities in this area, explored further in Chapter 5.⁵⁹

Figure 1: Adults’ confidence in judging information online



Source: Ofcom, *Understanding misinformation: an exploration of UK adults’ behaviour and attitudes, Making Sense of Media* (November 2024), p 13: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/dis-and-mis-information-research/mis-and-disinformation-report.pdf?v=386069> [accessed 21 July 2025]

22. Prof van der Linden told us that younger audiences are more susceptible to misinformation than adults,⁶⁰ while academics at Salford Business School warned that “digital and media literacy skills can too often be assumed” among younger age groups.⁶¹ According to Ofcom, 35 per cent of eight to 17 year-olds think all or most information on social media is true.⁶² Qualitative research by the regulator reveals that children “found it difficult to work out what was true on social media or online generally, and few were motivated to validate the information they were seeing”.⁶³
23. Others suggested that the media literacy needs of older generations were more acute.⁶⁴ Ofcom found that “age is the strongest indicator of someone’s media literacy skills, confidence and attributes”, although it noted that older

57 Q 69 (Dr Gianfranco Polizzi)

58 Ofcom, *Understanding misinformation: an exploration of UK adults’ behaviour and attitudes, Making Sense of Media* (November 2024), p 13: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/dis-and-mis-information-research/mis-and-disinformation-report.pdf> [accessed 16 June 2025]

59 See para 151.

60 Q 6 (Prof van der Linden)

61 Written evidence from Salford Business School (MLI0027)

62 Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report* (May 2025), p 44: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/children/childrens-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025/childrens-media-literacy-report-2025.pdf?v=396621> [accessed 10 July 2025]

63 Ofcom, *Children’s Media Lives, Ten years of longitudinal research* (2024), p 39: [ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/children/children-media-use-and-attitudes-2024/childrens-media-lives-2024-summary-report.pdf?v=367549](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/children/children-media-use-and-attitudes-2024/childrens-media-lives-2024-summary-report.pdf?v=367549) [accessed 16 June 2025]

64 Q 110 (Matteo Bergamini); Written evidence from Connect Futures (MLI0016)

adults exhibit stronger media literacy in some areas.⁶⁵ Mr Morris argued that while it was right to focus on schools and young people, “we should not forget the rest of society”.⁶⁶

24. **A failure to prioritise media literacy in the UK presents a threat not only to individual citizens, but to democracy itself. New technology has transformed our media and information environment in recent years, with social media algorithms having a profound impact. As this combines with the growing popularity of generative AI, change and complexity are likely to accelerate. Statistics from Ofcom and others make clear that UK citizens are poorly equipped to navigate today’s increasingly crowded information environment. Urgent action from Government is needed.**

65 Ofcom, *Adults’ Media Use and Attitudes Report* (May 2025), p 7: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/adults/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-2025/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025.pdf> [accessed 3 July 2025]

66 [Q 65](#) (Chris Morris)

CHAPTER 3: MEDIA LITERACY POLICY

25. This chapter focuses on two key actors in the UK’s media literacy sector, the Government and Ofcom. We examine how responsibilities are currently distributed between them and how effective those arrangements are. First, we set out examples of international best practice in media literacy that the UK could learn from.

International comparisons

26. Finland was consistently cited as an exemplar in relation to media literacy;⁶⁷ the country has placed first in the Open Society Institute’s European Media Literacy Index every year since it was first published in 2017.⁶⁸ Canada, Ireland and Belgium also ranked among the top ten countries (and above the UK) in the Open Society Institute’s Expanded Media Literacy Index 2023.⁶⁹
27. International rankings reflect structural and cultural differences. For example, Belgium, Finland, Ireland and Canada all reported levels of trust in their national governments above the OECD average.⁷⁰ Good Things Foundation also noted the “link between examples of international best practice and countries living in the shadow of a significant external security threat”, citing Finland and Russia as an example.⁷¹

Box 1: International models for media literacy policy

Finland’s national policy framework for media literacy was first published in 2013, and updated in 2019.⁷² The strategy is coordinated and implemented by the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), a governmental agency under the Ministry of Education and Culture. KAVI also coordinates the Finnish Safer Internet Centre, and works closely with the National Agency for Education.⁷³ KAVI has been tasked with evaluating and refreshing Finland’s media literacy strategy in 2025.⁷⁴ Finland’s approach to media literacy in schools is explored in Chapter 6.

67 Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#)), The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#)), Good Things Foundation ([MLI0046](#)), Full Fact ([MLI0047](#))

68 Written evidence from Full Fact ([MLI0047](#)). See: Finland Toolbox, ‘Media Literacy Education in Finland’: <https://toolbox.finland.fi/life-society/media-literacy-and-education-in-finland/> [accessed 25 June 2025]

69 Open Society Institute Sofia, *The Media Literacy Index 2023* (June 2023), p 10: <https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MLI-report-in-English-22.06.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

70 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, ‘OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions—2024 Results’: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results_9a20554b-en.html [accessed 7 July 2025]

71 Written evidence from Good Things Foundation ([MLI0046](#))

72 [Q 19](#) (Leo Pekkala)

73 [Q 18](#) (Leo Pekkala)

74 [Q 20](#)

The Flemish Government published its Media Literacy Concept Paper in 2012 as a joint proposal between the Minister of Media and Minister of Education.⁷⁵ It established Mediawijs, a non-governmental organisation, in 2013 to “set up government-wide and sector-wide action on media literacy” for the Flemish population.⁷⁶ Mediawijs is funded by the Flemish Minister of Media through “multi-annual strategic funding agreements” related to strategic goals.⁷⁷

In Ireland, the broadcasting regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, funds and facilitates Media Literacy Ireland (MLI), an informal, stakeholder-led network of more than 350 voluntary members dedicated to promoting media literacy across Ireland.⁷⁸ Its membership includes “the media, communications, academia, online platforms, libraries, the informal education sector and civil society”.⁷⁹ At present, media literacy policy is split across several frameworks and policy areas. We heard that the 2016 strategy published by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, the predecessor of Coimisiún na Meán, is likely to be updated soon.⁸⁰

Canada does not have a national media literacy policy, and media literacy is devolved across Canada’s provinces and territories.⁸¹ However, MediaSmarts, an independent charitable organisation, has been conducting research, developing educational resources and raising awareness about digital media literacy across Canada since 1996. A registered charity, MediaSmarts does not have “core funding or any formal relationships in an ongoing way with government”.⁸² It receives funding from corporate partners, including major telecommunications and technology companies, as well as grants from federal, provincial and territorial governments.⁸³

UK Government work to date

28. In 2021, the then Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport launched a three-year Government online media literacy strategy.⁸⁴ The strategy’s primary aim was to “support the sector in delivering its work more effectively and in a coordinated way.”⁸⁵

Box 2: Online Media Literacy Strategy 2021–24

The Conservative Government’s 2021–24 strategy comprised three main elements:

75 Mediawijs, ‘What is media literacy’: <https://www.mediawijs.be/en/article-overview/what-media-literacy> [accessed 25 June 2025]

76 Q 18 (Andy Demeulenaere)

77 Q 19 (Andy Demeulenaere)

78 Media Literacy Ireland, ‘What is Media Literacy Ireland’: <https://www.medialiteracyireland.ie/> [accessed 25 June 2025]

79 Q 35

80 Q 36

81 Q 39

82 Q 38

83 Q 42. See MediaSmarts, ‘Corporate Partnerships’: <https://mediasmarts.ca/get-involved/corporate-partnerships> [accessed 25 June 2025]

84 HM Government, *Online Media Literacy Strategy* (July 2021): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f6a632d3bf7f56867df4e1/DCMS_Media_Literacy_Report_Roll_Out_Accessible_PDF.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

85 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049)

- a media literacy framework made up of five principles, which set out the key skills and knowledge required for strong user media literacy capabilities: keeping personal data safe; understanding the online environment; critically analysing online content; recognising offline consequences of online actions; and contributing to a respectful online environment. The framework further set out steps for online platforms to take to promote and support users' media literacy.
- a set of 11 “strategic sector priorities” for organisations involved in the delivery of media literacy activity, including online platforms, civil society organisations, news organisations, academia, public services, regulators, and government.
- a commitment to tackle six cross-sector media literacy “challenges” to improving media literacy rates: a lack of data to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy interventions; a lack of long-term, stable funding; difficulties reaching hard-to-reach audiences; gaps in provision for vulnerable users; the harm of mis and disinformation; and a lack of coordination within the media literacy sector.⁸⁶

The former Government published annual action plans outlining the steps it would take to deliver against these objectives.

29. The Government told us that since 2022, it has provided “nearly £3 million in government funding” to 17 media literacy projects.⁸⁷ In addition, the previous Government established a media literacy taskforce, online hub and the UK Media Literacy Forum; delivered a social media campaign; funded programmes to upskill librarians and youth workers; and commissioned research on media literacy.⁸⁸
30. Commenting on the impact of the 2021 strategy, witnesses noted that it was valuable in raising awareness and identifying challenges.⁸⁹ We heard it was not “matched by the scale, coordination or investment needed to meet the challenges” of the current media environment, however.⁹⁰
31. The Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA) remarked that:

“Nearly four years after the strategy was published, the fragmented and siloed nature of the environment remains. There is a lot of valuable work undertaken on the ground, but it is largely not scalable, difficult to sustain and prone to all the difficulties associated with short-term financing.”⁹¹

86 HM Government, *Online Media Literacy Strategy* (July 2021), p 18: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f6a632d3bf7f56867df4e1/DCMS_Media_Literacy_Report_Roll_Out_Accessible_PDF.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

87 [Q 251](#); Written evidence from HM Government ([MLI0049](#))

88 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, ‘Year 2 Online Media Literacy Action Plan (2022/23)’ (April 2022): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/year-2-online-media-literacy-action-plan-202223> [accessed 25 June 2025]; Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, ‘Year 3 Online Media Literacy Action Plan (2023/24)’ (October 2023): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/year-3-media-literacy-action-plan-202324/year-3-online-media-literacy-action-plan-202324> [accessed 25 June 2025]

89 [Q 175](#) (Frances Yeoman), [Q 73](#) (Dr Gianfranco Polizzi); Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#))

90 Written evidence from WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

91 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance([MLI0033](#))

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Assistant Professor in Digital Media and Communications at the University of Birmingham, agreed that the UK's media literacy sector remains "fragmented, under-funded and under-evaluated", despite the strategy's aims.⁹² These points were echoed by several other stakeholders.⁹³

32. Providing a specific example of the challenge of short-term funding cycles, Vicki Shotbolt, CEO of the charity Parent Zone, told us that its Everyday Digital programme, which was funded through grants under the 2021 strategy, reached "over 60,000 parents in a year" by training local champions across the UK.⁹⁴ However, "the funding stopped because the strategy was closed", meaning that the charity's work "will have to be radically scaled back".⁹⁵ Internet Matters, a charity focused on children's online safety, suggested that the Government's "piecemeal" approach to pilots, combined with the limited provision of follow-on funding, has restricted media literacy organisations' ability to conduct robust evaluations and identify opportunities for best practice to be shared and scaled.⁹⁶
33. The National Literacy Trust told us that the impact of the 2021 strategy's media literacy framework "remains unclear due to the lack of available evaluations". It noted the 2023 research completed under the strategy on the uptake of media literacy initiatives among hard-to-reach groups,⁹⁷ but argued:

"There is a lack of evidence regarding if and how the findings from this strategy have been used to support the groups identified as requiring overall support."⁹⁸

Good Things Foundation told us that the "final learnings" from the Media Literacy Taskforce Fund have also not been published and hoped that "this will happen in due course."⁹⁹ In 2024, the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee called for the Government to undertake "a detailed assessment" of the impact of the 2021 strategy "to ensure that it is on the right track and to inform future delivery".¹⁰⁰

34. **The issues that the 2021–24 Online Media Literacy Strategy aimed to tackle persist: the media literacy sector continues to be held back by an approach that favours small-scale, short-term initiatives. The lack of a public impact assessment of the strategy has further limited opportunities for evaluation and improvement.**
35. ***The Government should publish a detailed impact assessment of the 2021–24 Online Media Literacy Strategy. This should identify***

92 Written evidence from Dr Gianfranco Polizzi (MLI0045)

93 Q 124 (Alistair Barfield), Q 175 (Frances Yeoman, Elli Narewska); Written evidence from Frances Yeoman (MLI0013), Parent Zone (MLI0014), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Shout Out UK (MLI0031), Voice of the Listener and Viewer (MLI0028), WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

94 Q 125

95 Written evidence from Parent Zone (MLI0014)

96 Written evidence from Internet Matters (MLI0039)

97 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, *Media literacy uptake among 'hard to reach' citizens* (June 2023): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6511619206e1ca000d616116/media_literacy_uptake_among_hard_to_reach_citizens.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

98 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

99 Written evidence from Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

100 Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, *Trusted voices* (Sixth Report of Session 2023–24, HC 175), para 41

the lessons learned from its grant-funded pilots. The Government must articulate next steps arising from the strategy, including how successful initiatives should be scaled and funded for long-term impact.

Fragmentation and lack of Government join-up

36. On fragmentation in the sector, Frances Yeoman, Head of Journalism at Liverpool John Moores University, told us that:

“The implications of initiatives such as the 2021 strategy was that media literacy could be left to the ‘rich landscape of businesses, civil society and other organisations taking action’ and that government work be focused on supporting this pre-existing activity.”¹⁰¹

Academics at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) noted, however, that stakeholders in the sector have reported:

“a lack of knowledge about media literacy among ministers and civil servants in areas where it is very relevant (e.g. health, education), and rapid turnover of responsible teams”.

As such, they warned, “institutional knowledge is lost and there is a danger of duplication rather than progress over time.”¹⁰²

37. We heard that duplication has indeed occurred, since media literacy initiatives have been funded by many different government departments, including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and the Home Office.¹⁰³ Dr Polizzi spoke of “silos between government departments with a stake in media literacy”.¹⁰⁴ Matteo Bergamini MBE, CEO of advocacy charity Shout Out UK, commented:

“I remember being in a conversation with a couple of those departments, and they had no idea that the other side were doing X, Y, and Z. There are all these different conversations going on ... It should not be down to the third sector to help government departments talk to each other.”¹⁰⁵

38. Several witnesses identified that government silos needed to be addressed and called for “stronger cross-departmental coordination mechanisms”.¹⁰⁶ As Full Fact put it:

“The Government must reimagine the structural ownership of media literacy to avoid the lack of coherence it has inherited from the previous government. Historically, media literacy has been a ‘homeless issue’ with minimal cross-departmental coherence, which led to very little action.”¹⁰⁷

39. The Department for Education (DfE) was rarely mentioned in discussions of government work to date; our evidence suggested that stakeholder

101 Written evidence from Frances Yeoman ([MLI0013](#))

102 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

103 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

104 Written evidence from Dr Gianfranco Polizzi ([MLI0045](#))

105 [Q 121](#) (Matteo Bergamini)

106 Written evidence from Frances Yeoman ([MLI0013](#)), Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#))

107 Written evidence from Full Fact ([MLI0047](#))

organisations have found it particularly challenging to collaborate with the department. Hannah Perry, Associate Director, Information Ecosystems at Demos, told us that the DfE “has largely been very absent, historically, from conversations about media literacy”.¹⁰⁸ When asked whether Shout Out UK had had any engagement with the DfE, Mr Bergamini stated: “I would like to say yes, but no, we have not.” He described it as “the department ... that we speak to least”, emphasising that this was “not by our choice”. Ms Shotbolt and Alistair Barfield, an independent media literacy practitioner, said this mirrored their experience; Mr Barfield described the DfE’s absence from media literacy activity as “the elephant in the room”.¹⁰⁹ Others suggested that Ofcom had also struggled to secure collaboration from the DfE in the past.¹¹⁰

40. Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety at DSIT, acknowledged that the Government’s work on media literacy to date “was not as comprehensive as it could have been” and that the Government had been “on a learning curve”. She told us, however, that “there were some very real learnings” from the pilot projects delivered under the 2021–24 strategy, which would be applied “in a more consistent way going forward”.¹¹¹
41. On cross-departmental collaboration, Baroness Jones emphasised that DSIT now leads a “new Whitehall working group that is ... aligning all the efforts of all the different departments”, including the DfE, the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).¹¹² Chloe Templeton, Deputy Director for Information Resilience and Public Safety at DSIT, told us that the official-led working group meets monthly and operates “at a deputy director level and at a more junior working level”. In her view, the Government is now “the most joined-up we have been across Whitehall on this issue”.¹¹³
42. **The Government does not have a good track record of joined-up leadership on media literacy; we saw limited evidence of effective coordination across departments under the previous strategy. The reported lack of engagement from the Department for Education to date is a particular cause for concern. A new working group intended to coordinate media literacy efforts across government does not appear to have sufficient authority to drive effective cross-government cooperation and change in its current guise.**
43. *The Government must evaluate the effectiveness of the new working group, and develop it as necessary, including by changing the frequency of its meetings and the seniority of participants, to ensure it genuinely delivers a joined-up approach across government departments.*

108 [Q 58](#) (Hannah Perry)

109 [Q 126](#)

110 Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham ([MLI0001](#)), Media Education Association ([MLI0038](#))

111 [Q 251](#)

112 [Q 262](#)

113 [Q 274](#)

The role of Ofcom

44. The Communications Act 2003 gave Ofcom a general duty to promote and research media literacy.¹¹⁴ Ofcom launched its Making Sense of Media (MSOM) programme in 2019, through which it conducts research, commissions pilots and convenes a network of stakeholders.¹¹⁵ The Online Safety Act 2023 updated and added specificity to Ofcom’s media literacy duties in relation to online media.¹¹⁶

Box 3: Ofcom’s media literacy duties under the Online Safety Act 2023

Alongside its overall duty to promote media literacy, following the passing of the Online Safety Act 2023, Ofcom’s responsibilities now include:

- Building public awareness of how people can protect themselves online, focusing on groups disproportionately affected by harm (including women and girls). Ofcom must also help users understand and reduce exposure to mis and disinformation.
- Encouraging the development and use of technologies and systems to help users protect themselves online. The regulator is also required to signpost users to further information about how they can mitigate harms when using services.
- Publishing a media literacy strategy and a statement recommending ways in which others, including platforms and broadcasters, might develop, pursue and evaluate media literacy activities or initiatives.

The regulator published its first media literacy strategy in October 2024. It said it will publish its statement of recommendations for platforms and broadcasters in the autumn of 2025.¹¹⁷

Source: Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

Box 4: Ofcom’s three-year media literacy strategy

Ofcom’s media literacy strategy, which will run till 2027, set out that media literacy is “everyone’s business”. It identified that Ofcom will “act as a convenor-catalyst, working with key stakeholders to drive evidence-based best practice and amplify outcomes”.

The strategy has three central pillars:

- Research, Evidence and Evaluation: Ofcom will continue its research programme, identifying and amplifying “what works” in media literacy. It will showcase effective media literacy interventions and support others to evaluate their media literacy activities effectively.
- Engaging Platforms: Ofcom will encourage platforms to provide better media literacy support for their users, more evaluation of the effectiveness of that support, and longer-term funding for media literacy initiatives. Ofcom will also review what broadcasters are doing to support audiences’ media literacy.

¹¹⁴ Communications Act 2003, [Sections 11](#) and [14a](#)

¹¹⁵ Ofcom, ‘Making Sense of Media’: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-literacy/making-sense-of-media> [accessed 25 June 2025]

¹¹⁶ Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

¹¹⁷ [Q 213](#)

- People and Partnerships: Ofcom aims to make media literacy a greater priority for a broader range of organisations, and for priority workforces (including educators) to be better enabled to deliver media literacy skills. The regulator will commission targeted media literacy initiatives working with trusted delivery partners, and convene experts to improve media literacy provision.

Source: Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050), Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom's Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (7 October 2024): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf?v=392801> [accessed 21 July 2025]

45. Our evidence generally provided a favourable assessment of Ofcom's work on media literacy to date.¹¹⁸ Ofcom's engagement with professionals and its leveraging of existing networks were highlighted as particular strengths.¹¹⁹
46. While we heard a range of definitions of media literacy,¹²⁰ Ofcom defines it as "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications across multiple formats and services".¹²¹ Several witnesses endorsed this one-line definition, praising its clarity, concision and breadth.¹²² The Voice of the Listener and Viewer noted that Ofcom's definition "contains no reference to critical analysis or assessment".¹²³ Kate Davies, Director of Public Policy at Ofcom, argued that "to understand, use and create involves critical thinking".¹²⁴
47. In addition, we heard that "Ofcom's long-standing commitment to robust research and evidence-gathering" was "commendable"¹²⁵ and "really valuable" to the sector.¹²⁶ The Advertising Association and Media Smart commented:

"By evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and disseminating these insights, Ofcom can empower organisations and stakeholders to

118 Q 75 (Dr Gianfranco Polizzi); Written evidence from Dr François Nel (MLI0005), National Literacy Trust (MLI0008), Parent Zone (MLI0014), Wikimedia UK (MLI0017), Prof Julie Firmstone and Prof John Steel (MLI0019), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046), Cwmpas (MLI0042)

119 Written evidence from Parent Zone (MLI0014), Mhor Collective (MLI0002), Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MLI0033), National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

120 These included UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Framework, the European Digital Media Observatory's definition and the UK Council for Internet Safety's 2020 Education for a Connected World framework. See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Literacy Assessment Framework: Country Readiness and Competencies* (2013), p 17: <https://allchildrenlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Global-Media-and-Information-Literacy-Assessment-Framework-country-readiness-and-competencies-UNESCO-Digital-Library.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]; European Digital Media Observatory, *EDMO Guidelines for Effective Media Literacy Initiatives* (October 2024), p 3: <https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/EDMO-Guidelines-for-Effective-Media-Literacy-Initiatives.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]; HM Government, *Education for a Connected World—2020 edition* (June 2020): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5efa05b4e90e075c5492d58c/UKCIS_Education_for_a_Connected_World_.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

121 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom's Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 3: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

122 Q 164 (Elli Narewska); Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

123 Written evidence from Voice of the Listener and Viewer (MLI0028)

124 Q 212

125 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

126 Q 175 (Frances Yeoman)

develop and implement more impactful programmes tailored to their target audiences.”¹²⁷

48. At the same time, witnesses expressed frustration about the regulator’s continued emphasis on “small-scale” pilots. This has “made both comparative analyses of practice and scaling up initiatives more difficult”¹²⁸ and does “not allow for long-term capacity building or system-level transformation”.¹²⁹
49. Shout Out UK suggested that Ofcom should now use its expertise and infrastructure to provide multi-year funding.¹³⁰ Its CEO, Mr Bergamini, argued:

“Pilots are great but we have been running them since I started this in 2015. At a certain point, we need eventually to make a decision and start to do some long-term funding, because three-month stints are not how you solve this problem”.¹³¹

Others agreed that Ofcom could more helpfully focus on “large scale longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of media literacy interventions on a greater portion of the population”.¹³²

50. **While some stakeholders find the concision and clarity of Ofcom’s media literacy definition helpful, the Committee believes it fails to reflect the central importance of critical thinking and analysis to media literacy.**
51. *Ofcom should update its definition of media literacy to make more explicit reference to critical thinking.*
52. **Ofcom’s research has been valuable in establishing and sharing ‘what works’ in media literacy. However, its focus on short-term funding for individual pilot programmes is unlikely to tackle long-standing issues in the media literacy sector.**
53. *In order to build on its existing evidence base, Ofcom must enable longer-term and larger-scale research projects, rather than multiple short-term pilots.*

Limitations of Ofcom’s role

54. Ofcom is the owner of “the only up-to-date media literacy strategy at national level”;¹³³ Baroness Jones confirmed that the Government’s strategy for media literacy now sits within its digital inclusion action plan,¹³⁴ which was put out for consultation in February 2025.¹³⁵ Some witnesses felt that the Government is “outsourcing”¹³⁶ media literacy to the regulator, deliberately

127 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#))

128 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#))

129 Written evidence from WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

130 Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#))

131 [Q 121](#)

132 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#)). See also written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Media and Information Literacy Alliance([MLI0033](#))

133 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

134 See Box 5.

135 [Q 255](#)

136 Written evidence from Dr Gianfranco Polizzi ([MLI0045](#))

or otherwise, and “treating media literacy as solely within Ofcom’s remit”.¹³⁷ Our 2024 report on the future of news expressed concern about Ofcom being “left to be the main lead for such a complex policy issue”, particularly given the “major burdens” it has taken on in relation to the online safety regime.¹³⁸

55. The regulator told us that its media literacy team “comprises 12 core staff” and that it is investing “£1.62 million this year alone” into implementing its three-year strategy.¹³⁹ In comparison, Ofcom had 346 full-time equivalent staff working on online safety in 2022–23. It estimated that its total cumulative costs of preparing for and implementing the new online safety regime would be £169 million by the end of 2024–25.¹⁴⁰
56. While several stakeholders supported Ofcom’s three-year media literacy strategy¹⁴¹ we heard that it does not meet the scale of the challenge.¹⁴² Some argued that it does not engage sufficiently with local community infrastructure, including youth work, libraries and grassroots organisations.¹⁴³ Others suggested that Ofcom takes a “protectionist”¹⁴⁴ approach that is overly focused on online harms,¹⁴⁵ which “narrows the scope of media literacy in this country to a limited and somewhat functional space”.¹⁴⁶
57. These shortcomings result in part from Ofcom’s position as the independent regulator. Its strategy is, therefore, “carried out within the parameters of existing policy and regulatory responsibilities”.¹⁴⁷ The Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA) told us that Ofcom is unable to take on the “activist advocacy role” needed to promote engagement and collaboration.¹⁴⁸ Others emphasised that Ofcom cannot convene government departments and that its remit does not extend to children’s education.¹⁴⁹ Wikimedia UK told us that “in practice Ofcom does not have sufficient resources to support the development of media literacy at scale”.¹⁵⁰
58. The limitations of Ofcom’s reach were apparent in its own evidence to our inquiry. While it identified that media literacy interventions should be embedded into the delivery of wider public services, it added:

137 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

138 *The future of news*, para 192

139 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0056)

140 National Audit Office, *Preparedness for online safety regulation* (July 2023), p 4: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/preparedness-for-online-safety-regulation-summary.pdf> [accessed 10 July 2025]

141 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008), Parent Zone (MLI0014), Wikimedia UK (MLI0017), Prof Julie Firmstone and Prof John Steel (MLI0019), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), BBC (MLI0053), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

142 Written evidence from WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

143 Written evidence from Mhor Collective (MLI0002), Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026), WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

144 Q 55 (Hannah Perry); Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026)

145 Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026)

146 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

147 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

148 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MLI0033)

149 Q 98 (Carolyn Bunting), Q 175 (Elli Narewska); Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham (MLI0001), François Nel (MLI0005), Frances Yeoman (MLI0013), Parent Zone (MLI0014), Sarah Pavey (MLI0021), Media Education Association (MLI0038), Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

150 Written evidence from Wikimedia UK (MLI0017)

“As an independent regulator it is not for us to make specific recommendations for policy approaches other public bodies should take in this area”.¹⁵¹

59. Ofcom has said repeatedly that its role is one of a “convenor-catalyst”, since media literacy is “everyone’s business”.¹⁵² Ed Leighton, interim Group Director for Strategy and Research at Ofcom, argued that the regulator’s duty to produce a media literacy strategy did not mean that it should “take ownership or monopolise thinking on how media literacy should be done”.¹⁵³
60. Instead, Mr Leighton said its focus “is on identifying and then filling gaps in the provision from what is a broad and active sector.”¹⁵⁴ He argued that providing a media literacy programme with “national coverage” was “not actually the role” Ofcom was asked to play in the Online Safety Act.¹⁵⁵ Rather, Ofcom’s role is to “establish what works” then “bring the wider sector together to convene and amplify those findings, so that they can be scaled into larger programmes.”¹⁵⁶
61. Baroness Jones suggested that this description “undersold” Ofcom’s role in relation to media literacy:

“My understanding is that it now sees its role as much broader than the very detailed specifics in the Act. It has to prepare a media literacy strategy every three years and we expect that to be more all-encompassing.”

She felt that the regulator should “get into the guts of the media literacy duties” by conducting research, developing best practice, engaging with platforms, and raising awareness and understanding of harmful content and misinformation.¹⁵⁷ In her view, the Government’s role is to “provide the legislation that we need to; look at the curriculum issues ... provide the funding; and do some of the campaigning work.”¹⁵⁸

62. Our evidence suggested that there is an additional, important part for the Government to play in providing strategic leadership, given the limitations of Ofcom’s remit. Parent Zone warned that the regulator:

“will be powerless and limited without central government leadership. Only the Government can coordinate efforts between departments, mandate action at a local authority level and place media literacy in the curriculum”.¹⁵⁹

151 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

152 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050). See for example Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom’s Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 7: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]; Ofcom, *Making Sense of Media Annual Plan 2025/26* (October 2024), p 3: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/annual-plans/msom-annual-plan-24-25.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]; Ofcom, *What works in delivering media literacy activities* (September 2024), p 3: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/evaluate/what-works-in-media-literacy/what-works-in-delivering-media-literacy-activities2.pdf> [accessed 26 June 2025]

153 Q 225

154 Q 217

155 Q 221 (Ed Leighton)

156 Q 219

157 QQ 253, 261

158 Q 253

159 Written evidence from Parent Zone (MLI0014)

63. According to Internet Matters, however, “at present, there is no clear, joined-up leadership from government that supports and amplifies Ofcom’s strategy within a wider national framework”.¹⁶⁰ Many stakeholders identified this gap and emphasised the need for it to be addressed.¹⁶¹
64. **As the independent regulator, Ofcom is not the appropriate body to coordinate or deliver a nationwide media literacy programme. Only the Government can do this. To date, the Government has failed to fill this leadership vacuum.**
65. *The Government must provide a clearer overall direction for media literacy work across Whitehall and translate Ofcom’s media literacy strategy into action. It must coordinate the work across education, public services and local government that is essential to deliver a comprehensive media literacy programme. This requires the nomination of a specific, senior minister to take responsibility for media literacy across government departments and to establish clearer lines of accountability on this issue to Parliament.*

Digital inclusion

66. In 2023, we set out in our report on digital exclusion that millions of people in the UK lacked access to mobile or broadband, as well as basic digital skills. We called on the Government to update its 2014 digital inclusion strategy¹⁶² and establish a cross-government unit to embed digital inclusion across priority policy areas.¹⁶³ The proposed new digital inclusion action plan takes forward a number of these recommendations.

Box 5: The digital inclusion action plan

The Government published its *Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps* in February 2025 as a joint policy paper from DfE, DSIT, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions and MHCLG. A call for evidence on the plan closed in April 2025.¹⁶⁴

The plan set out that the Government would, among other things:

- establish a ministerial group on digital inclusion;
- set up a new Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit to drive work across government;
- launch a Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund to support local initiatives that increase digital participation;

¹⁶⁰ Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

¹⁶¹ [Q 74](#) (Dr Gianfranco Polizzi), [Q 79](#) (Dr Emma Stone), [Q 120](#) (Vicki Shotbolt); Written evidence from Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#)), Cwmpas ([MLI0042](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

¹⁶² HM Government, ‘Government Digital Inclusion Strategy’ (December 2014): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy> [accessed 2 July 2025]

¹⁶³ Communications and Digital Committee, *Digital exclusion* (3rd Report of Session 2022–23, HL Paper 219)

¹⁶⁴ A summary of responses to the call for evidence was published in July 2025. See HM Government, ‘Summary of Responses: Call for Evidence on the Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps’ (17 July 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/digital-inclusion-action-plan/outcome/digital-inclusion-action-plan-summary-of-responses-published-17-july-2025> [accessed 17 July 2025]

- convene a Digital Inclusion Action Committee, which would comprise experts from industry, the third sector, local authorities, devolved governments and academics to scrutinise, steer and help determine the Government's approach to digital inclusion; and,
- conduct research to understand what works in digital inclusion.¹⁶⁵

The plan lists as a focus supporting adults to “independently perform the tasks in the Essential Digital Skills framework”.¹⁶⁶ Recognising “the need to mitigate the potential harms of being online”, the action plan committed to “develop[ing] new initiatives to support people in developing key media literacy skills”.¹⁶⁷

67. The Government told us that “by enhancing digital inclusion, we are also laying the groundwork for improved media literacy”, as the action plan “integrates digital inclusion, digital skills, and media literacy, ensuring people have the essential skills to live, work, and participate safely in our digital society”.¹⁶⁸ Baroness Jones commented: “we are basically putting most of the media literacy work in the digital inclusion action plan because there is so much overlap”. She argued that the plan “provides a really good umbrella body, if you like, for our work on media literacy”, since digital inclusion work is “one of the Government's major priorities”.¹⁶⁹
68. Some stakeholders argued that media literacy is a natural extension of digital inclusion.¹⁷⁰ Andy Demeulenaere, General Coordinator at the Flemish Knowledge Centre for Digital and Media Literacy, explained that digital inclusion and media literacy are addressed together in Flanders:
- “We see that, as soon as you get somebody online and with technical digital skills, you also need the social, creative and critical skills that come with media literacy to actually do it and not be more vulnerable in the digital space.”¹⁷¹
- Equally, we heard that some media literacy programmes found they had to support more basic digital inclusion needs before they could deliver media literacy education.¹⁷²
69. Research suggests that local and regional media literacy initiatives across the UK tend to “piggyback” on existing digital inclusion strategies and

165 HM Government, *Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps* (February 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps> [accessed 21 July 2025]

166 The Essential Digital Skills Framework defines the skills needed to safely benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world of today and the future. Department for Education, *Essential Digital Skills Framework* (12 September 2018): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b9246d4e5274a4236952309/Essential_digital_skills_framework.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]

167 HM Government, *Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps* (February 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps> [accessed 21 July 2025]

168 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049)

169 Q 252

170 Q 164 (Frances Yeoman); Written evidence from Mhor Collective (MLI0002), Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

171 QQ 18, 23 (Andy Demeulenaere)

172 Written evidence from Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

networks.¹⁷³ Dr Emma Stone, Director of Evidence and Engagement at Good Things Foundation, was confident that the action plan addressed several issues relevant to media literacy.¹⁷⁴ Others praised the cross-departmental, ministerial-level commitment to digital inclusion that the plan represents.¹⁷⁵

70. On the other hand, Parent Zone described the Government's decision to replace the Media Literacy Taskforce¹⁷⁶ with a new Digital Inclusion Action Committee¹⁷⁷ as "highly regrettable".¹⁷⁸ Good Things Foundation warned that new funding provided by the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund should not repeat mistakes of the previous strategy's grant schemes.¹⁷⁹
71. Ms Shotbolt also warned that media literacy often "becomes a subset of something bigger and more important, which means that it does not have the focus and the long-term planning that it should".¹⁸⁰ The Guardian Foundation noted that efforts to increase digital inclusion "tend to be focused on functional digital skills and often miss out the crucial critical thinking skills that must go alongside these".¹⁸¹ This sentiment was echoed in the Government's summary of responses to its call for evidence on the action plan, which noted concerns that "digital literacy training must extend beyond technical know-how; individuals also need to acquire the skills required to critically evaluate information sources."¹⁸²
72. Ms Yeoman warned that media literacy sometimes "goes by the wayside" in favour of digital inclusion, which has "much more tangible" metrics, for example "the amount of free data handed out".¹⁸³ She argued:

"If media literacy is to go beyond accessing the internet ... to encompass the skills and confidence to think critically and be an engaged citizen once they are digitally included, it is important that this is given sufficient policy focus—notwithstanding the fact that progress is harder to measure."¹⁸⁴

Noting that the Government was unlikely to establish a "separate ministerial-level, cross-departmental media literacy committee", she instead emphasised the importance of "ensuring that media literacy gets ring-fenced time and attention" under the new digital inclusion framework.¹⁸⁵

173 University of Liverpool, *Exploring challenges and best practice in media literacy: A UK regional case study approach* (April 2024): <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/humanitiesampsocialsciences/documents/Digital,Inclusion,and,Media,Literacy,Policy,Projects,Final,Report.pdf> [accessed 16 June 2025]

174 Q 79

175 Q 226, Q 125 (Vicki Shotbolt), Q 165 (Frances Yeoman); Written evidence from Full Fact (MLI0047), Ofcom (MLI0050)

176 See Box 2.

177 HM Government, 'Digital Inclusion Action Committee': <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/digital-inclusion-action-committee> [accessed 10 July 2025]

178 Written evidence from Parent Zone (MLI0014)

179 Written evidence from Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

180 Q 125 (Vicki Shotbolt)

181 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

182 HM Government, 'Summary of Responses: Call for Evidence on the Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps' (17 July 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/digital-inclusion-action-plan/outcome/digital-inclusion-action-plan-summary-of-responses-published-17-july-2025> [accessed 17 July 2025]

183 Q 165 (Frances Yeoman)

184 Written evidence from Frances Yeoman (MLI0013)

185 Q 174 (Frances Yeoman)

73. Mr Leighton warned that “effective digital inclusion cannot just be giving people a broadband connection and the devices to use it”, describing work that Ofcom and Good Things Foundation had done to incorporate media literacy skills into the charity’s existing digital inclusion work.¹⁸⁶ Ofcom also highlighted that while benchmarks for digital inclusion, such as the Essential Digital Skills Framework,¹⁸⁷ include metrics for evaluating and understanding information online, media literacy “encompasses a wide range of skills, knowledge and behaviours” that extend beyond these.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Mr Leighton emphasised that Ofcom was:

“clear on the Government’s approach to digital inclusion, and we very much welcome that they have set that out. We are clear that we can complement it with a wider range of media literacy work, as we are required to under the Act.”¹⁸⁹

74. Responding to concerns that media literacy is only mentioned briefly in the action plan, Baroness Jones insisted that it “has all the elements you would expect of digital inclusion, digital skills and media literacy”, and that “media literacy will be a major part of that activity” once the plan is implemented.¹⁹⁰ She argued that, by giving media literacy “a proper home” within a policy area that is “such an important priority for the Government ... it will now have the support, funding and expertise it requires”. She also expressed a hope that “some of the new funding coming on stream” through the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund would “fund new initiatives” from media literacy organisations.¹⁹¹ While Ms Templeton assured us that “media literacy experts ... will be able to feed in expertise and knowledge on media literacy” through the Digital Inclusion Action Committee,¹⁹² media literacy is not mentioned in the committee’s terms of reference.¹⁹³ Baroness Jones insisted, however, that media literacy will not be overlooked:

“I can see why you are concerned about it but I genuinely do not think it will be a problem. I genuinely think the digital inclusion action plan will take this seriously and will report on the media literacy elements of it.”¹⁹⁴

75. **The Government’s digital inclusion action plan is a positive example of a cross-departmental approach and provides a strong foundation on which to build. We welcome that it takes forward recommendations made in our 2023 report on tackling digital exclusion. However, media literacy should not be sidelined as a result of this shift in focus. The action plan makes limited reference to media literacy. Information provided to date about the Digital Inclusion Action Committee does not suggest that the topic will receive sufficient attention.**
76. *The Government must give much more explicit emphasis to media literacy in its action plan for digital inclusion, ensuring*

186 See Box 5; Written evidence from Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#))

187 See Box 5

188 Written evidence from Ofcom ([MLI0050](#))

189 [Q 230](#)

190 [Q 256](#)

191 [Q 258](#)

192 [Q 257](#)

193 HM Government, ‘Digital Inclusion Action Committee: terms of reference’ (10 July 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-committee-terms-of-reference/digital-inclusion-action-committee-terms-of-reference> [accessed 10 July 2025]

194 [Q 259](#)

that it is recognised as a related, but discrete, area of work. The plan should serve as a catalyst for more joined-up work on media literacy, as well as digital inclusion. It should provide details of the “new initiatives” the Government will develop to enable people to build key media literacy skills. Evaluation of initiatives carried out under the digital inclusion action plan must include specific reporting on improvements in media literacy skills. The minister with responsibility for media literacy must be a member of the ministerial group on digital inclusion to ensure that specific focus on media literacy is sustained.

77. *The Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund should include significant long-term investment in discrete media literacy programmes. In delivering it, the Government should learn from the mistakes of the previous media literacy strategy and avoid contributing to further fragmentation and duplication across media literacy and digital inclusion initiatives. The Government should articulate clearly how this work integrates with Ofcom’s programmes and builds on the regulator’s research into best practice.*

CHAPTER 4: TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA COMPANIES' CONTRIBUTIONS

78. Ofcom's media literacy strategy set out the ambition that "platforms and broadcasters will provide better media literacy support for their users, more evaluation of the effectiveness of that support, and longer-term funding for media literacy initiatives."¹⁹⁵ This chapter therefore examines the part that platforms and the news industry have to play in enhancing UK media literacy.

Online services and technology platforms

79. Our report on the future of news found that technology firms now have "unprecedented influence over the information we see".¹⁹⁶ Ofcom's media literacy strategy recognised the "growing responsibilities of the major online platforms who have such a big influence over the content and the context in which people encounter it". It asserted that online platforms and services have an "important role to play in promoting media literacy to the millions of people that use them".¹⁹⁷
80. During our inquiry, representatives from Google, TikTok and Roblox¹⁹⁸ told us that they recognised the role of online platforms and services in delivering a "whole-of-society response" to media literacy,¹⁹⁹ while Meta highlighted "the shared responsibility of government, industry, and regulators in advancing media literacy".²⁰⁰ Some media literacy sector organisations spoke positively about their experience of collaborating with platforms.²⁰¹

Existing platform initiatives

81. Platform support for media literacy currently falls into three broad categories:
- off-platform educational programmes, for example Google's Be Internet Legends and Super Searchers programmes;²⁰²
 - on-platform media literacy by design interventions, such as prompts to check information or consult further resources;²⁰³ and
 - awareness campaigns, for example YouTube's Hit Pause initiative²⁰⁴ or TikTok's #SaferTogether campaign.²⁰⁵

195 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom's Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 12: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

196 *The future of news*, p 3

197 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom's Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 12: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

198 Roblox is an online video game platform where users can create, publish and share their own games. Parent Zone, 'Roblox: a parent guide': <https://parentzone.org.uk/article/roblox> [accessed 26 June 2025]

199 [Q 128](#)

200 Written evidence from Meta ([MLI0052](#))

201 Written evidence from Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Meta ([MLI0052](#))

202 [Q 128](#), [Q 143](#) (Zoe Darmé)

203 [Q 132](#) (Ben Bradley), [Q 128](#) (Zoe Darmé)

204 [Q 109](#), [Q 131](#) (Zoe Darmé)

205 [Q 153](#) (Ben Bradley)

82. On AI, Meta said it has “implemented several measures to make the origin of AI-generated content transparent”, including adding visible markers to photorealistic images created with Meta AI. The company is also building tools and developing common standards for identifying AI-generated content across industry.²⁰⁶ Similarly, Zoe Darmé, Director of Trust Strategy at Google Search, pointed to the “double-check” feature on Google’s Gemini AI chatbot.²⁰⁷
83. We heard from some stakeholders that platforms offer credibility, familiarity, scale and market knowledge to deliver initiatives successfully, particularly among younger audiences.²⁰⁸ Shout Out UK told us that advertising support from X helped its DISMISS campaign aimed at first-time voters to reach 6.2 million viewers.²⁰⁹ Vicki Shotbolt, CEO of Parent Zone, argued that her organisation’s work with Google “is bigger and more sustained, and it has a better evidence base” compared to initiatives Parent Zone has delivered with government support.²¹⁰ Ofcom research suggests that social media, online influencer content, and video games can be effective routes for engaging young people with media literacy,²¹¹ as well as reaching diverse audiences with messaging on mis and disinformation.²¹²

A “cautious view”

84. On the other hand, we heard that platforms’ media literacy initiatives need to do more to address core issues of their business models and product design, which can “actively frustrate” media literate behaviours.²¹³ Recent Ofcom-commissioned research identified that “platforms are designed to promote engagement, often limiting users’ ability to control how content is personalised, manage notifications, or regulate their time spent online”.²¹⁴ Participants in a separate study commissioned by the regulator suggested that persuasive design features may have financial, wellbeing and mental health impacts for children.²¹⁵
85. The House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee’s inquiry on social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms recently

206 Written evidence from Meta ([MLI0052](#))

207 [Q 132](#) (Zoe Darmé)

208 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#))

209 [Q 219](#); Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#))

210 [Q 115](#) (Vicki Shotbolt)

211 Ofcom, *Exploring high media literacy among children and adults* (December 2023), p 14: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/adults/high-media-literacy-among-adults-and-children/exploring-high-media-literacy-among-adults-and-children?v=330526> [accessed 10 July 2025] See also written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#))

212 Ofcom, *Co-creating ways to navigate and mitigate against mis and disinformation* (May 2025), p 41: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/mis-and-disinformation/co-creating-ways-to-navigate-and-mitigate-against-mis-and-disinformation-verian-report.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

213 Written evidence from Dr Helen Ringrow, Dr Karen Middleton, Dr Ali Body, and Oliver Hayes ([MLI0020](#)), Sense about Science ([MLI0025](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#)), Media Education Association ([MLI0038](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

214 Ofcom, *Behavioural Audit of Online Services* (June 2025), p 24: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/online-safety/research-statistics-and-data/online-services-research/a-behavioural-audit-of-online-services-in-the-uk_thematic-report.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]

215 Ofcom, *Persuasive Design Features and Potential Child Financial Harms – Qualitative Research* (June 2025), p 42: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/online-safety/research-statistics-and-data/online-services-research/persuasive-design-features-and-potential-child-financial-harms-report.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

explored how technologies used by online platforms can lead to the amplification of false or harmful information. It found that “social media business models incentivise the spread of content that is damaging and dangerous”.²¹⁶ Academics at LSE identified unease among practitioners about working with platforms “when nothing is being done to address the root cause of harm, which lies in platform business models”.²¹⁷ Others warned against platforms using media literacy to shift the burden of responsibility onto individual users, rather than taking action to reduce the likelihood of users encountering false or harmful content in the first place.²¹⁸ Exploring methods of labelling AI-generated deepfakes, Ofcom cautioned that “platforms should avoid placing the full burden on individuals to detect misleading content” and warned against making “sweeping claims” about the efficacy of such interventions.²¹⁹

86. Several witnesses cautioned that platforms can easily change their content policies.²²⁰ Some highlighted in particular Meta’s decision in early 2025 to suspend its third-party fact-checking programme in the US.²²¹ Chris Morris, CEO of Full Fact, advised that media literacy “could become even more important if we see those companies that control so much of our information environment beginning to shirk their responsibilities”.²²² However, Meta told us there is “no immediate plan to end the third party fact-checking program” in the UK.²²³
87. Against this backdrop, Dr Elinor Carmi, Senior Lecturer in Data Politics and Social Justice at City St George’s University of London, warned that “collaboration with these platforms around media literacy and digital rights needs to be handled carefully” as the platforms “have not proven themselves to put people’s wellbeing and digital rights at the top of their priorities”.²²⁴ The Media Education Association likewise said it “takes a cautious view of the actions of online platforms, whose interests are not served by having a critically informed and media literate public”.²²⁵ The National Literacy Trust argued that “while online platforms bear some considerable responsibility for improving media literacy in the UK ... we cannot expect this to occur without sanction”.²²⁶

216 *Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms*, p 13

217 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

218 Q 4 (Dr Mhairi Aitken), Q 175 (Frances Yeoman)

219 Ofcom, *Deepfake Defences 2: The Attribution Toolkit* (July 2025), p 6: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/online-safety/information-for-industry/deepfake-defences-2/deepfake-defences-2---the-attribution-toolkit.pdf?v=399908> [accessed 11 July 2025]

220 Q 53 (Hannah Perry); Written evidence from Dr Helen Ringrow, Dr Karen Middleton, Dr Ali Body, and Oliver Hayes (MLI0020), Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026), Media Education Association (MLI0038), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

221 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster (MLI0012), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043). See Meta (MLI0052), and Meta, ‘More Speech and Fewer Mistakes’ (7 January 2025): <https://about.fb.com/news/2025/01/meta-more-speech-fewer-mistakes/> [accessed 16 June 2025]

222 Q 53 (Chris Morris)

223 Written evidence from Meta (MLI0052)

224 Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026)

225 Written evidence from Media Education Association (MLI0038)

226 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

Lack of accountability and transparency

88. There is currently no formal requirement for platforms to support media literacy, however.²²⁷ Some platforms have voluntarily adopted Ofcom's Best Practice Principles for Media Literacy by Design.²²⁸ Laura Higgins, Director of Civility at Roblox, said its commitment to the principles will keep Roblox "laser-focused on how we can keep improving and building in those milestones".²²⁹
89. Civil society organisations have previously expressed concerns about the best practice principles' lack of specificity and limited accountability measures.²³⁰ Hannah Perry, Associate Director, Information Ecosystems at Demos, advised that the principles fail to set out a "minimum standard" for platforms, who are required only to inform Ofcom of what their own media literacy by design standards are.²³¹

Box 6: Best Practice Principles for Media Literacy by Design

Ofcom published its Best Practice Principles for Media Literacy by Design in April 2024, following a public consultation and development with an industry working group. These set out steps that online services can take to promote media literacy through their platform design, focusing on three key areas:

- increasing accountability for making media literacy a priority on-platform, with greater transparency surrounding what works;
- focusing on user-centric design that embeds accessible support and timely interventions across the user journey; and
- monitoring and evaluating the effects of media literacy interventions.²³²

In October 2024, Ofcom announced that four platforms (Google Search, Roblox, Pinterest, and The LEGO Group) voluntarily committed to the principles and submitted information showing how they are being adopted.²³³ Further progress reports were published in May 2025.²³⁴

90. Ed Leighton, Acting Group Director for Strategy and Research at Ofcom, defended the best practice principles, arguing that it is important for the regulator to engage with industry to "build and establish best practice ahead of making formal regulatory provisions or expectations".²³⁵ Kate Davies, Director of Public Policy at Ofcom, was confident that Ofcom will "drive

227 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#)), Full Fact ([MLI0047](#))

228 See Box 6.

229 [Q 154](#) (Laura Higgins)

230 Ofcom, *Ofcom's Making Sense of Media Establish Working Group* (5), p 1: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media-establish/meeting-minutes/minutes-of-establish-working-group-meeting-held-on-21-november-2023?v=330656> [accessed 2 July 2025]

231 [Q 64](#) (Hannah Perry)

232 Ofcom, *Media literacy by design* (April 2024): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-2-6-weeks/270395---media-literacy-by-design/associated-documents/best-practice-principles-media-literacy.pdf?v=357138> [accessed 3 July 2025]

233 Ofcom, 'Online services pledge to prioritise media literacy' (7 October 2024): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-literacy/Online-services-pledge-to-prioritise-media-literacy>

234 See, for example Ofcom, *Media Literacy by Design Self-Assessment* (February 2025): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy-update/google-search---msom-pledge-updates-feb-2025.pdf?v=396386> [accessed 2 July 2025]

235 [Q 211](#)

considerable progress” through its upcoming statement of recommendations to platforms,²³⁶ but conceded that this will not be “enforceable in the same way” as, for example, the Online Safety Act codes of practice.²³⁷

91. Moreover, we heard that “platforms may claim to support media literacy without concrete evidence of meaningful interventions”²³⁸ due to there being “little publicly available data” on the impact of platforms’ media literacy initiatives.²³⁹ Academics at LSE stressed that user data is “essential for gathering evidence of the links between media literacy and actual behaviour (rather than intent, or short-term changes, which are currently used as proxies in much research)”.²⁴⁰
92. Youth Select Committee members told us that platform interventions, such as the prompt to enter a passcode that appears on TikTok when users aged under 18 hit a 60-minute daily screen time limit,²⁴¹ are often easy to override.²⁴² Research suggests that the effects of other user-control features “are not always clear to users”.²⁴³ Prof Sander van der Linden, Professor of Social Psychology in Society at the University of Cambridge shared his experience of conducting research relating to user behaviour on online platforms:

“Often we do not have the crucial behavioural data ... [The platforms] are the only ones who know what people are clicking on and what they are sharing. We have cooperated with them in the past. You have to sign non-disclosure agreements, and they may or may not do something about the results of the experiments. There is a huge issue around transparency.”²⁴⁴

The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee’s report on social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms similarly highlighted the importance of tech platforms being transparent.²⁴⁵

93. Ben Bradley, Senior Government Relations and Public Policy Manager at TikTok, assured us that the platform takes evaluation seriously, and shared examples of how prompts relating to potential community guideline violations had been found to impact user behaviour. He also stated that “measurement is one of the biggest challenges.”²⁴⁶ Ms Higgins told us that Roblox is developing methods of conducting A/B testing²⁴⁷ to measure “media literacy and behaviour change”.²⁴⁸ We heard that both Google and TikTok work

236 See Box 3.

237 [Q 245](#)

238 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#))

239 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

240 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

241 ‘TikTok sets 60-minute daily screen time limit for under-18s’ *BBC News* (1 March 2023): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-64813981>

242 See Appendix 4.

243 Ofcom, *Behavioural Audit of Online Services* (June 2025), p 26: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/online-safety/research-statistics-and-data/online-services-research/a-behavioural-audit-of-online-services-in-the-uk_thematic-report.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]

244 [Q 8](#)

245 *Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms*, p 3

246 [Q 145](#)

247 This involves “comparing the outcomes of two different choices (A and B) by running a controlled mini-experiment.” It is often used during user experience testing to assess how changes to platforms’ design or features affect user behaviour. See Harvard Business School, ‘What is A/B testing and what is it used for?’: <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-ab-testing> [accessed 17 July 2025]

248 [Q 156](#)

closely with research organisations to evaluate their programmes and that researchers can conduct their own tests on those platforms using researcher APIs.²⁴⁹

Calls for stronger requirements

94. Witnesses were not confident that Ofcom’s reliance on voluntary efforts would suffice.²⁵⁰ We heard calls for stronger requirements for platforms to “implement evidence-based media literacy interventions and transparently report on their effectiveness”.²⁵¹
95. Some stakeholders suggested that Ofcom could better leverage its wider online safety powers to drive meaningful action on media literacy.²⁵² For example, Mr Bradley suggested that Ofcom could incorporate media literacy into the user empowerment duties that will apply to some ‘categorised’ services.²⁵³ Moreover, Ofcom’s media literacy strategy suggested that the regulator could use its “information gathering and transparency powers” to “explore the effectiveness” of platforms’ investment in developing users’ media literacy.²⁵⁴ The regulator did not provide further details on how this might be put into practice.²⁵⁵
96. Others argued that further instruction from Government was needed to “embolden” Ofcom in holding platforms to account for their media literacy activity.²⁵⁶ The Advertising Association and Media Smart noted that “while the Online Safety Act 2023 includes provisions related to media literacy, they largely fall on the shoulders of Ofcom” and recommended that the “specific responsibilities of regulated services ... be more clearly defined.”²⁵⁷ Mr Morris similarly recommended “legislation which puts a legal duty on these companies, which hold so much power, to be actively involved”.²⁵⁸
97. Prof van der Linden noted that the EU’s Digital Services Act gives more explicit powers in relation to mis and disinformation on platforms,²⁵⁹ and we heard that the Irish Online Safety Code introduced requirements for platforms regulated in Ireland to submit annual media literacy plans for

249 Q 155

250 Written evidence from Internet Matters (MLI0039)

251 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

252 Written evidence from Internet Matters (MLI0039), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

253 Q 160. The Online Safety Act 2023 introduced a system for categorising regulated online services based on size and functionality. Some regulated services will be designated as category 1, 2A or 2B services if they meet thresholds established in secondary legislation. Providers of categorised services will be required to comply with additional duties, depending on which category they fall within. A call for evidence on additional duties for categorised services closed in May 2024. See Ofcom, *Third phase of online safety regulation* (March 2024): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-2-6-weeks/281475-third-phase-of-online-safety-regulation/associated-documents/online-safety-phase-3-call-for-evidence.pdf?v=321357> [accessed 2 July 2025]

254 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom’s Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 13: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]. See Ofcom, *Draft transparency guidance* (July 2024): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-1-10-weeks/consultation-draft-transparency-reporting-guidance/main-docs/annex-a-draft-transparency-guidance.pdf?v=373325> [accessed 3 July 2025]

255 Q 246

256 Q 60 (Hannah Perry)

257 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

258 Q 60

259 Q 14

assessment by the regulator.²⁶⁰ Others warned that legislation would not be a “panacea” for addressing media literacy.²⁶¹

98. Representatives from Google and TikTok argued that they would continue promoting media literacy “whether it is mandated or not”, as the principles of trust, safety and informed usership were central to their products and aligned with business incentives. Roblox, however, expressed support for mandated media literacy activity, which might see “everyone taking more responsibility for these things”.²⁶²
99. Chloe Templeton, Deputy Director for Information Resilience and Public Safety at DSIT, told us that the Government “strongly encourage[s] the tech sector to go as far as they can on media literacy”.²⁶³ Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety at DSIT, stated that many tech platforms “are already doing their bit”. In addition, Ofcom is “already measuring the impact that those media literacy initiatives are having ... and will in due course be holding [platforms’] feet to the fire about what they are doing.”²⁶⁴ Baroness Jones told us that she would “urge other tech companies” to sign up to Ofcom’s best practice principles, although she acknowledged that these were “more of a voluntary thing”.²⁶⁵
100. When asked whether the Online Safety Act went far enough in requiring platforms to engage with media literacy, Baroness Jones suggested that “it is a requirement of the platforms to comply with Ofcom’s strategy on media literacy”.²⁶⁶ However, Ms Templeton clarified that “there is no statutory duty on platforms to provide media literacy education at the moment”. She explained:

“The Online Safety Act duties around media literacy were on Ofcom, so Ofcom has now got more powers to request information from platforms, engage with platforms and certainly ensure that platforms are understanding that they have a role to deliver media literacy as well.”²⁶⁷
101. Baroness Jones said she would like to hear from Ofcom “whether they feel that there is a gap”, adding “if there is ... then if needs be we will address it.”²⁶⁸
102. **We welcome Ofcom’s efforts to encourage technology platforms and online services to promote media literacy. However, encouragement and voluntary commitments are insufficient in addressing the impact that these platforms have had on the wider media and information environment.**
103. **We are not persuaded that Ofcom’s media literacy by design principles have driven meaningful change to date. Platforms can say they are incorporating media literacy into their design with little scrutiny or**

260 [Q 45](#)

261 [Q 54](#) (Will Gardner)

262 [Q 162](#)

263 [Q 289](#)

264 [Q 283](#)

265 [Q 286](#)

266 [Q 287](#)

267 [Q 286](#)

268 [Q 287](#)

accountability; at worst, this allows them to overstate their efforts in this area.

104. *In its forthcoming statement of recommendations for platforms, Ofcom must set out minimum standards for media literacy by design. The statement should also give details of how platforms' performance in meeting these can be evaluated and how platforms will be held accountable.*
105. *In responding to this report, Ofcom must clarify how it will use its wider powers under the Online Safety Act 2023 to drive greater activity and accountability from platforms. This should include detail on how it will use its information gathering powers to investigate the efficacy of platforms' media literacy interventions, as well as its intentions to include media literacy in the transparency reporting or user empowerment requirements for services that are 'categorised' under the Act.*
106. *We recommend that the Government establish stronger requirements on technology platforms to implement and evaluate media literacy interventions. Ofcom must be sufficiently empowered to take robust action to engage platforms in media literacy and hold them to account.*

Making platforms pay

107. Our evidence presented strong arguments for platforms to provide sustainable funding for media literacy programmes, to address long-standing issues of short-term funding and fragmentation.²⁶⁹ The National Literacy Trust described “an urgent need for a sustainable media literacy fund sourced from industry contributions to ensure long-term programme viability”.²⁷⁰ As noted above, some third-sector organisations spoke positively of their partnership with technology firms.²⁷¹ In Canada, companies including Meta, TikTok and Google are corporate sponsors of MediaSmarts, the charity that coordinates the country's media literacy efforts.²⁷² Other stakeholders raised concerns about platform funding feeling like a “PR exercise rather than genuine commitment”,²⁷³ and stressed that platforms should fund “independent and well-established” programmes.²⁷⁴
108. The Online Safety Act stipulates that Ofcom's delivery of its online safety responsibilities under the Act should be funded by industry, via fees on regulated services. The fee regime is expected to be in force by the 2026–27 financial year. Ofcom can also impose penalties on services for breaches of requirements under the Act.²⁷⁵

269 Written evidence from Shout Out UK (MLI0031), Dr François Nel (MLI0005), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043), National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

270 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

271 See para 83.

272 See Box 1.

273 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

274 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

275 Ofcom, *Statement on Online Safety fees and penalties* (June 2025), p 3: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-1-10-weeks/consultation-online-safety---fees-and-penalties/main-documents/statement-on-online-safety-fees-and-penalties.pdf> [accessed 1 July 2025]

109. Shout Out UK proposed that the Act should be revised to introduce a levy that would require large technology companies to fund national media literacy initiatives.²⁷⁶ Other stakeholders echoed the call for an industry levy and argued that the resulting funds should be administered by Ofcom or the Government to preserve the independence of delivery partners.²⁷⁷ Dr Carmi explained:
- “This ‘online harms tax’ has to be separate from the platforms and technology companies so that they do not influence how they are run and allocated.”²⁷⁸
110. While Ofcom has said it will “work to ensure platforms’ funding of media literacy programmes”,²⁷⁹ we heard this approach is “vague and may not lead to meaningful commitments”.²⁸⁰ When asked whether Ofcom was exploring a levy on platforms to provide long-term funding for media literacy programmes, Mr Leighton said this was “not the role that was envisaged for us to play by Parliament” but rather “a question for the Government”.²⁸¹ Mr Leighton noted that Ofcom had commissioned the Charities Aid Foundation to assess the current state of media literacy funding.²⁸²
111. Baroness Jones recognised that the Online Safety Act provides for a levy against tech companies to fund Ofcom’s regulatory work, but said it was for Ofcom to choose whether to “broaden out how they defined that work”. She declined to comment on whether a wider levy should exist.²⁸³
112. **While some platforms have developed sustained partnerships with third-sector organisations, offering stable funding and brand visibility, platforms’ priorities can shift quickly. We reject an approach to long-term funding that relies on the goodwill of technology companies.**
113. **At a time of great financial challenges for both media organisations and government, we believe that the funding for large scale media literacy programmes should substantially come from the technology sector. The allocation of this funding would need to be managed by Ofcom or the Government to preserve the independence of initiatives and delivery partners.**
114. ***The Government should develop mechanisms, including a levy on platforms, to secure long-term, stable funding from industry for independent media literacy initiatives.***

276 Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#))

277 Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi ([MLI0026](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

278 Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi ([MLI0026](#))

279 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom’s Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 14: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

280 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#))

281 [QQ 243–44](#)

282 [Q 244](#)

283 [Q 288](#)

News industry

115. Turning to the role of the news industry, there are two main ways it can support efforts to improve media literacy.²⁸⁴ The first is through the development and delivery of media literacy programmes that focus on building journalistic skills and media production.²⁸⁵ Secondly, and more importantly, news organisations and public service broadcasters (PSBs) provide the trusted and accurate news content that underpins a healthy information ecosystem.²⁸⁶ We heard that the BBC’s mission to inform, educate and entertain gives the broadcaster a particular responsibility in relation to media literacy.²⁸⁷

Media literacy initiatives

116. A number of media organisations administer media or news literacy programmes themselves.²⁸⁸ Others, such as the Economist Educational Foundation and The Guardian Foundation are independent charities, but draw on the expertise of journalists and the media organisations they are associated with.²⁸⁹ Frances Yeoman, Head of Journalism at Liverpool John Moores University, highlighted that the news media industry was involved in 19 per cent of the 170 media literacy projects identified by DCMS in its 2021 mapping exercise. Her narrower analysis of news literacy projects found that “15 per cent were actively run by media organisations and 35 per cent involved journalists in some capacity”.²⁹⁰
117. Some of these initiatives support participants to create their own media,²⁹¹ which we heard is an effective form of media literacy education.²⁹² Elli Narewska, Head of News and Media Literacy at The Guardian Foundation, told us that the charity’s NewsWise programme supported children to “report their own news stories about their own lives and communities”, which gave them “a sense of agency”.²⁹³ Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Assistant Professor in Digital Media and Communications at the University of Birmingham, who conducted an independent evaluation of NewsWise, identified “a positive relationship between developing news and media literacy in children and their civic engagement”.²⁹⁴
118. The Guardian Foundation has also piloted a peer learning media literacy programme for 14–18 year-olds, Behind the Headlines, in communities

284 Written evidence from University of Westminster (MLI0012), Voice of the Listener and Viewer (MLI0028), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

285 Written evidence from IMPRESS (MLI0006), Prof Julie Firmstone and Prof John Steel (MLI0019), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Dr Helen Ringrow, Dr Karen Middleton, Dr Ali Body, and Oliver Hayes (MLI0020), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043), Decentred Media (MLI0048)

286 Written evidence from First News (MLI0018), Ofcom (MLI0050), HM Government (MLI0049), BBC (MLI0053)

287 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049), BBC (MLI0053)

288 See The Times News Literacy Programme, ‘How it works’: <https://www.timesnewsliteracy.co.uk/how-it-works/> [accessed 2 July 2025]; Global Forum for Media Development, ‘The Telegraph Media Literacy Programme 2025’: <https://gfmd.info/engagements/the-telegraph-media-literacy-programme-2025/> [accessed 2 July 2025]

289 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

290 Written evidence from Frances Yeoman (MLI0013)

291 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

292 Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham (MLI0001), National Literacy Trust (MLI0008), Common Sense Media (MLI0011), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Tecola Smith (MLI0036), Ukie (MLI0035)

293 Q 170 (Elli Narewska)

294 Written evidence from Dr Gianfranco Polizzi (MLI0045)

in central England. It trained 807 pupils as ‘media literacy ambassadors’, who then went on to train a further 3,742 young people.²⁹⁵ According to an evaluation of the programme conducted by the National Literacy Trust, the programme supported participating students to “learn techniques for evaluating the reliability of news and had a positive impact on media and news literacy attitudes and confidence.”²⁹⁶

119. Ms Yeoman warned, however, that while “some of these initiatives are talked about quite a lot ... the collective, explicit educational contributions of the industry are quite small compared to the scale of the population-level challenge that we are dealing with.” She added that the news industry as a whole could be “more coordinated about advocating for media literacy, identifying priorities and supporting awareness raising”. This is more common in other countries, she suggested.²⁹⁷ We heard positive examples from Flanders²⁹⁸ and Ireland, where news publications provided free advertising space for a public awareness campaign run by Media Literacy Ireland.²⁹⁹

Cui bono—Who benefits?

120. Academics researching public understanding of journalism regulation identified a correlation between low levels of news literacy and low levels of trust in news.³⁰⁰ Others cited “promoting trust in journalism”³⁰¹ as an aim for media literacy, and warned that a failure to act would lead to distrust in journalism and the media.³⁰² The Government similarly noted research suggesting links between news literacy and trust in journalism, and the propensity to pay for online news.³⁰³
121. Jonathan Heawood, Executive Director of the Public Interest News Foundation, cautioned, however, against media literacy being used by news organisations as a form of “media marketing”. As he put it:

“If the intended outcome is simply that the public are properly informed and empowered to make choices, their choice might be none of the above—“I will not engage with any of this media; I do not like any of it now that I am fully informed”. To me, that seems a legitimate outcome of media literacy proper, but it might not be the intended outcome of media marketing or media engagement.”³⁰⁴
122. On a similar note, Professor David Buckingham, Emeritus Professor at UCL Institute of Education, told us that “significant questions” have been raised about “the involvement of commercial media” in the media literacy sector.³⁰⁵

295 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

296 National Literacy Trust, ‘Behind the Headlines: Media Literacy Ambassadors evaluation’ (31 May 2024): <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/behind-the-headlines-media-literacy-ambassadors-evaluation/> [accessed 16 June 2025]

297 Q 168

298 Q 20 (Andy Demeulenaere)

299 Q 35 (Martina Chapman)

300 Written evidence from Prof Julie Firmstone and Prof John Steel (MLI0019)

301 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

302 Written evidence from Tecola Smith (MLI0036), Full Fact (MLI0047), Financial Times (MLI0051)

303 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049)

304 Q 164

305 Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham (MLI0001)

Academics at LSE argued that high media literacy “would not mean that everyone agrees, or that everyone trusts media”.³⁰⁶

Providing high-quality journalism

123. The increased consumption of news online has made the provision of “high-quality, professionally produced content” more urgent.³⁰⁷ Despite their growing prevalence, online or social media news sources score lower on trust, accuracy and impartiality compared to TV, newspapers and radio.³⁰⁸ We were warned too that media literacy must be “broader than online” and consider the “needs of those who seek their information and particularly news offline”.³⁰⁹ Ms Yeoman argued that “many millions of people still rely on more traditional sources including TV and radio for their news”,³¹⁰ the reach of television news, although in decline, remains at parity with online sources at around 70 per cent of UK adults.³¹¹
124. The Government told us that “news organisations play a crucial role in promoting accurate journalism, helping the public discern credible information”.³¹² Ofcom similarly highlighted the “importance of high-quality and accurate news that people can trust”.³¹³
125. Our report on the future of news outlined several policy arguments for the value of news journalism, including public accountability, social cohesion and support for democracy.³¹⁴ Furthermore, we emphasised the role of a “healthy media sector, staffed by professionals producing stories that engage the public” as one of the most effective safeguards against the erosion of a “shared understanding of fact”.³¹⁵ We called on the Government to do more to recognise the value of a financially sustainable news sector.³¹⁶

Local news

126. We heard that local media is particularly important as a news source “where people really feel themselves represented in media”.³¹⁷ Mr Heawood described local news as having the “distinguishing feature that people can see it, touch it, feel it and connect with it”.³¹⁸ Ms Narewska argued that “having local media to engage with” and “feeling that the news and the media represent you and your community” were “part of being media literate”.³¹⁹

306 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

307 Written evidence from Voice of the Listener and Viewer (MLI0028), Financial Times (MLI0051)

308 Ofcom, *News consumption in the UK 2024* (September 2024), p 9: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand-research/tv-research/news/news-consumption-2024/news-consumption-in-the-uk-2024-report.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

309 Written evidence from Frances Yeoman (MLI0013)

310 Written evidence from Frances Yeoman (MLI0013)

311 Ofcom, *News consumption in the UK 2024* (September 2024), p 5: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand-research/tv-research/news/news-consumption-2024/news-consumption-in-the-uk-2024-report.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

312 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049)

313 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

314 *The future of news*, paras 10–12

315 *The future of news*, para 190

316 *The future of news*, para 192

317 Q 53 (Hannah Perry)

318 Q 168

319 Q 175

127. As noted above, The Guardian Foundation’s NewsWise programme supported children to produce their own local news stories.³²⁰ Decentred Media cited examples of community radio and neighbourhood news organisations that engaged their local communities in news creation, and recommended this be adopted more widely.³²¹ Ofcom has previously recommended that “local news organisations develop news literacy programmes in conjunction with their communities”, recognising that “bottom-up approaches which engage with people at grassroots are particularly effective at delivering media literacy outcomes”.³²² However, Ms Yeoman warned against placing “another responsibility on an already-stretched sector”.³²³ Our report on the future of news explored the significant and long-standing financial challenges faced by the local news sector, and called on the Government to provide support through measures including tax breaks and training schemes.³²⁴ More recently, a report by Demos, a cross-party think-tank, called for targeted funding for local news organisations, noting that:

“Local news infrastructure in the UK has been decimated, leaving a void in trusted information about the issues most locally relevant to citizens—a vacuum that can be filled with speculation and heated debate on social media and messaging platforms, fuelling distrust and at risk of spiralling towards conspiracism”.³²⁵

128. Responding to our future of news report in January 2025, the Government spoke of the “vital and endangered role that local journalism plays in our communities”. It explained that it was “considering all possible options to support local journalism” through its upcoming local media strategy.³²⁶ During the subsequent debate on our report, Baroness Twycross, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, reiterated these points. She noted too the “vital role” local journalism had played during the Southport riots “in informing the public of events as they unfolded, helping to de-escalate tensions”. The local media strategy “is intended to strengthen” that role, she explained. However, she did not provide an update on when it would be published.³²⁷
129. **Advances in technology amplify both the value of professional journalism, and the fragility of the industry’s future. We reiterate the recommendation made in our report on the future of news that the Government should recognise more explicitly the value of a financially sustainable news sector. This represents the best way to maintain a shared understanding of facts.**
130. **Local news supports media literacy within communities through relevant and trusted news provision. Grassroots initiatives supporting**

320 [QQ 170, 175](#)

321 Written evidence from Decentred Media ([MLI0048](#))

322 Ofcom, *Review of local media in the UK: Part 2 Final Report* (November 2024), pp 39–40: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/bbc/bbc-annual-report/2024/review-of-local-media-in-the-uk-part-2-report.pdf?v=386116> [accessed 17 Jul 2025]

323 [Q 175](#)

324 *The future of news*, paras 30–31

325 Demos, *Epistemic Security 2029* (February 2025), p 7: https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Epistemic-Security-2029_accessible.pdf [accessed 25 June 2025]

326 Government response to the Communications and Digital Committee report *The future of news* (January 2025): <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/46455/documents/237597/default/> [accessed 17 July 2025]

327 HL Deb, 25 April 2025, [col 940](#)

communities to produce their own local journalism are also valuable. We are concerned that, despite recognising the vital but vulnerable role of the local media sector, the Government has not yet taken steps to support it.

131. *The Government must publish its local media strategy by the autumn of 2025. This should take into account the important role of local journalism in supporting media literacy.*

Public service media

132. Public service media play a vital role in providing trustworthy news and countering misinformation through high-quality journalism.³²⁸ According to Mr Leighton, trust in news provided by the public service broadcasters (PSBs) is “persistently high” compared to other media.³²⁹ Ofcom data indicate that audiences are broadly satisfied with the PSBs and their provision of trusted and accurate news,³³⁰ though Mr Leighton acknowledged that this is “not consistent across all parts of society”.³³¹ Ofcom’s strategy states that “broadcasters, and particularly the public service broadcasters, have a role to play in encouraging media literacy among all audiences”.³³²
133. Ofcom told us that it has “various workstreams in place to consider how public service broadcasters can promote media literacy”.³³³ These include:
- working with PSBs through the Public Service Media Review³³⁴ “to understand their approaches to mitigating mis and disinformation and consider what more could be done to enable people”; and
 - retaining the requirement for PSBs to promote media literacy in updated guidance for PSBs under the Media Act 2024.³³⁵

328 Written evidence from School of Media and Communications, University of Westminster (MLI0012), HM Government (MLI0049)

329 Q 235 (Ed Leighton)

330 Ofcom, *Media Nations: UK 2024* (September 2024), pp 13–15: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/multi-sector/media-nations/2024/media-nations-2024-uk.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

331 Q 235

332 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom’s Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 12: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

333 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

334 Ofcom has a duty under the Communications Act 2003 to report periodically (generally every five years) on the extent to which the public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and S4C) have fulfilled the purposes of public service media. The Public Service Media Review evaluates content delivery and examines the impact of changing audience habits, technology, and market dynamics. It will also consider recommendations to support the future sustainability of public service media. See Ofcom, *Review of Public Service Media: Terms of Reference* (September 2024): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/public-service-broadcasting/information-for-industry/statement-public-service-media-review---terms-of-reference/statement-public-service-media-review---terms-of-reference.pdf?v=379608> [accessed 2 July 2025]

335 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy: Ofcom’s Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (October 2024), p 5: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

Mr Leighton added that Ofcom’s forthcoming statement of recommendations for platforms and broadcasters³³⁶ would update its “expectations of broadcasters on media literacy”.³³⁷

134. Arguing that the PSBs do not produce enough programming that encourages critical engagement with media, the Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV) called on Ofcom to:

“make clear to the PSBs that, as part of the “appropriate range of genres” necessary to fulfil the new PSB remit defined in the Media Act, they must produce programming dedicated to promoting media literacy.”³³⁸

135. However, Ms Yeoman described “a certain amount of push-back” from some broadcasters against Ofcom’s suggestion that they provide further support for media literacy beyond “investing millions of pounds in accurate journalism”, especially in light of challenging financial conditions.³³⁹ As we have set out previously, the provision of high-quality news content is not particularly profitable.³⁴⁰ PSBs face challenges in making their content widely accessible against the backdrop of significant declines in revenues.³⁴¹

Inform, educate, entertain

136. The BBC’s role in promoting media literacy differs from that of other PSBs.³⁴² The BBC told us that media literacy is “highly relevant” to its overarching mission to “inform, educate, and entertain”, as well as its public purposes,

“which include a duty to provide impartial news and to support learning for people of all ages. We deliver trusted educational content, specialist news services, outreach programmes, and innovative projects in partnership with schools, platforms, and industry stakeholders.”³⁴³

137. Ofcom highlighted the BBC’s “important role as a trusted provider of impartial news and engagement with audiences across the UK” and said that it is “assessing [the BBC’s] delivery of duly accurate and impartial news and educational content” on an ongoing basis.³⁴⁴ We examined three ways in which the broadcaster supports media literacy, and evaluated opportunities for improvement.
138. First, the BBC told us that it plays a “central role” in supporting media literacy as the “world’s most trusted news provider”, citing Ofcom research on BBC News’ reach, trust and accuracy.³⁴⁵ Others highlighted the contribution of BBC Verify,³⁴⁶ a specialist fact-checking unit that explains the BBC’s

336 See Box 3, para 90.

337 [Q 211](#)

338 Written evidence from Voice of the Listener and Viewer ([MLI0028](#))

339 [Q 168](#)

340 *The future of news*, para 33

341 Ofcom, *Review of Public Service Media (2019–23)* (17 December 2024), p 5: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-guidance/psb/2024/review-of-public-service-media-2019-2023.pdf?v=389567> [accessed 21 July 2025]

342 [Q 168](#) (Frances Yeoman); Written evidence from HM Government ([MLI0049](#)), Ofcom ([MLI0050](#))

343 Written evidence from BBC ([MLI0053](#))

344 Written evidence from Ofcom ([MLI0050](#))

345 Written evidence from BBC ([MLI0053](#))

346 See BBC News, ‘Explaining the “how”—the launch of BBC Verify’ (22 May 2023): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65650822> [accessed 21 July 2025]

editorial process, in helping audiences fact-check information,³⁴⁷ although the rationale for BBC Verify has been questioned³⁴⁸ and it has faced criticism for the accuracy of its reporting.³⁴⁹ Members of the Youth Select Committee told us that they turned to BBC Verify in order to fact-check information they encountered elsewhere.³⁵⁰

139. In a speech on 14 May 2025, Tim Davie, Director-General of the BBC, announced an ambition for the UK to become “a global leader in trusted information”. He proposed actions including putting more BBC content on social media; expanding BBC Verify; and using AI to create a “new gold standard fact checking tool”. The speech expressed an intention to “strengthen the depth of BBC local journalism” and highlighted the importance of the BBC World Service in combatting mis and disinformation globally.³⁵¹ The BBC highlighted its additional contribution to media literacy through “shaping the wider information ecosystem”, namely through the development of content provenance standards. The broadcaster said the industry-led Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA) standards³⁵² could be a “powerful tool in safeguarding trust in an increasingly complex and AI-influenced media environment”.³⁵³ Furthermore, the Financial Times highlighted the BBC’s research on generative AI news summaries,³⁵⁴ and suggested that the BBC could work with other news organisations to “deliver trusted news to the UK public through key online gateways” such as search or social media platforms.³⁵⁵
140. Secondly, several stakeholders referenced the BBC’s educational remit and its existing media literacy initiatives.³⁵⁶ These include two flagship programmes:
 - Newsround—a children’s news programme providing age-appropriate news content. The BBC said it reaches 3.4 million seven to 11 year-olds every week at school. Newsround is also disseminated on social media.
 - Other Side of the Story—a partnership between BBC Education and BBC News that aims to help young people learn how to spot and respond to misinformation and fake news on social media and elsewhere. The BBC said it reached over 2.4 million learners in 2024, and over 3

347 [Q 235](#) (Ed Leighton); Written evidence from Digital Resilience in Education Team, Welsh Government ([MLI0037](#)), HM Government ([MLI0049](#))

348 Oral evidence taken before the Constitution Committee, inquiry on the rule of law, 21 May 2025 (Session 2024–25) [Q 80](#) (Joshua Rozenberg)

349 See for example: ‘The BBC fact-checking unit accused of political bias’, *The Telegraph* (26 November 2024) available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/11/26/bbc-verify-fact-checking-unit-accused-of-political-bias/> [accessed 21 July 2025]

350 See Appendix 4.

351 Tim Davie, Director-General, BBC, Speech at the Lowry Theatre, Stratford, 14 May 2025: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/speeches/2025/tim-davie-director-general-bbc-catalyst-for-trust> [accessed 21 July 2025]

352 The C2PA is a joint project involving Microsoft, Adobe, the BBC and others that aims to “collectively build an end-to-end open technical standard to provide publishers, creators, and consumers with opt-in, flexible ways to understand the authenticity and provenance of different types of media.” This may include information on when, where and how a piece of digital content was created. Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity, ‘FAQ’: <https://c2pa.org/faq/> [accessed 2 July 2025]

353 Written evidence from BBC ([MLI0053](#))

354 BBC, ‘Groundbreaking BBC research shows issues with over half the answers from Artificial Intelligence (AI) assistants’ (11 February 2025): <https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/2025/bbc-research-shows-issues-with-answers-from-artificial-intelligence-assistants> [accessed 16 June 2025]

355 Written evidence from Financial Times ([MLI0051](#))

356 [Q 168](#) (Frances Yeoman); Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster ([MLI0012](#)), HM Government ([MLI0049](#))

million views on social media channels. The accompanying outreach programme in schools reached 10,000 young people in 2024–25.

In addition, the broadcaster said it hosts an annual BBC Teach Live Lesson for Safer Internet Day, and that is exploring a future partnership with the National Literacy Trust focusing on Generative AI.³⁵⁷

141. Cerys Griffiths, Creative Director for BBC Education, acknowledged that the reach of its in-person activities remained small, citing resource constraints.³⁵⁸ She explained that teachers use the BBC’s media literacy educational resources “fairly reactively” in response to standalone events like Safer Internet Day, which does not represent “sustained use”. She suggested this was due to media literacy education not being mandated via integration in the curriculum: “If it was a priority and embedded, I think that our reach would be much greater”.³⁵⁹
142. Patricia Hidalgo, Director of BBC Children & Education, likewise advocated for media literacy to be prioritised in the curriculum. She said the BBC would be “uniquely placed” to support teachers in their delivery of media literacy education, adding:

“We are a public service media company. We are impartial; we are trusted ... We have education experts. We have news experts. We have “Newsround” that understands how to speak to children. If you combine all those things, we could be creating a powerful, well thought through and trusted media literacy course that could be imparted in schools. If we do not make it compulsory for teachers to do that, it just will not happen.”³⁶⁰
143. Other witnesses similarly recommended that the Government draw on the BBC’s expertise to develop resources for media literacy education.³⁶¹ In his speech on 14 May, the Director-General expressed a desire to “provide every single child in the UK with proper training on disinformation” and raised the idea of “developing qualifications around disinformation studies and media literacy”.³⁶² Media literacy education in schools is explored in Chapter 6.
144. Finally, we asked representatives from the BBC about opportunities to incorporate media literacy messaging across its wider output, such as in drama storylines. Lindsay McCoy, Executive Editor of BBC Verify, agreed this could be explored. She pointed to the BBC’s work for “Scams Week”, which saw tips for avoiding scams included “everywhere, from ‘The One Show’ to ‘Morning Live’ to ‘EastEnders’”.³⁶³

357 Written evidence from BBC ([MLI0053](#))

358 [Q 180](#)

359 [Q 196](#)

360 [Q 195](#) (Patricia Hidalgo)

361 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster ([MLI0012](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

362 Tim Davie, Director-General, BBC, Speech at the Lowry Theatre, Salford, 14 May 2025: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/speeches/2025/tim-davie-director-general-bbc-catalyst-for-trust> [accessed 21 July 2025]

363 [Q 181](#) (Lindsay McCoy)

145. However, we heard that any increased activity across education, programming or news would be possible only if the BBC is “properly funded and supported by Government, regulators and others”. The broadcaster concluded:

“The BBC is willing to do more to support media literacy across the UK and around the world, particularly around countering misinformation and disinformation and in supporting audiences of all ages to critically engage with content. ... putting the BBC, including the World Service, on a secure and sustainable financial footing is essential for work to continue and develop further.”³⁶⁴

146. **Public service broadcasters make a significant contribution to media literacy through their provision of trusted and accurate news. The BBC’s current work to support media literacy through its educational resources is useful, but we note that limited resource restricts its reach. We welcome the emphasis placed on the BBC’s role in supporting media literacy in the recent speech by Tim Davie and will examine the BBC’s future work in this area as part of our remit to scrutinise the broadcaster.**

364 Written evidence from BBC ([MLI0053](#))

CHAPTER 5: MEDIA LITERACY FOR ADULTS

147. We were warned that “today’s adults are not equipped with the skills they need for the modern information ecosystem”.³⁶⁵ This is concerning for adults in their own right but also in respect of their duty of care to others, especially children. Engaging adults in media literacy education “presents a significant challenge”, however.³⁶⁶ The first part of this chapter sets out these challenges, while potential solutions are explored in the second half.

Barriers to engagement

148. Parent Zone described a “perfect storm of challenges” in reaching adults with media literacy education.³⁶⁷ Leo Pekkala, Deputy Director at the National Audiovisual Institute of Finland (KAVI), agreed that adults were the hardest to reach, suggesting “it is the same situation everywhere”.³⁶⁸ Key barriers to engaging adults in media literacy initiatives include: poor awareness of media literacy; a lack of perceived relevance; inaccurate perceptions of their own skills; a lack of time and resources to participate; and mistrust of provider organisations and platforms.³⁶⁹ Similar themes emerged from our evidence.
149. First, we heard that “public awareness and buy-in to media literacy is low”.³⁷⁰ Marc Davies, Digital Programme Lead at Welsh social enterprise Cwmpas, described media literacy as an “alien term” that “does not really impact Joe Bloggs on the ground”. He added:
- “Our experience of the term ‘media literacy’ ... is that they have a very low recognition of it, and they do not see it as a skill they need to build within their life, even though they consume media extensively.”³⁷¹
150. Parent Zone agreed that media literacy was “poorly understood and seen to be largely irrelevant by adults unless it relates specifically to their daily lives”.³⁷² Dr Emma Stone, Director of Evidence and Engagement at Good Things Foundation, told us she did not think that “most of us would wake up in the morning and think, ‘Yes, I want to become media literate today’”.³⁷³
151. Secondly, adults are “overconfident” in their media literacy skills.³⁷⁴ The Advertising Association and Media Smart told us that:

“Many adults do not recognise their own media literacy gaps or may perceive media literacy education as either unnecessary or primarily for children. Some may believe they are already sufficiently skilled at identifying misinformation or evaluating sources when evidence suggests otherwise”.³⁷⁵

365 [Q 39](#) (Matthew Johnson)

366 Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#))

367 Written evidence from Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#))

368 [Q 31](#)

369 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, *Media Literacy take-up among ‘hard to reach’ citizens* (June 2023), pp 32-33: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6511619206e1ca000d616116/media_literacy_uptake_among_hard_to_reach_citizens.pdf [accessed 21 July 2025]

370 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

371 [Q 70](#) (Marc Davies)

372 Written evidence from Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#))

373 [Q 69](#) (Dr Emma Stone)

374 Written evidence from Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#))

375 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)). See, for example, survey data from Full Fact in para 21.

152. Ofcom identified that adults “overestimate their media literacy abilities”, noting that “87 per cent of adults felt confident online in 2024, but only half (51 per cent) of search engine users were able to identify sponsored links on search engine results”.³⁷⁶ The Government similarly observed that “confidence issues and scepticism about the relevance of digital skills further hinder engagement.”³⁷⁷ Others suggested that adults may feel shame, stigma or fear about having low media literacy, and therefore not wish to seek help.³⁷⁸ Relatedly, we heard that adults can be resistant to changing long-standing habits and challenging pre-existing beliefs.³⁷⁹
153. Next, stakeholders identified that time pressures and competing priorities make it difficult for adults to engage in formal media literacy education.³⁸⁰ The Government recognised that “many adults face time constraints due to work or caring responsibilities, limiting their ability to attend regular sessions”.³⁸¹ Consequently, there are fewer “consistent touchpoints” for delivering media literacy education to adults.³⁸² Shout Out UK observed that:
- “Unlike school-aged individuals who are routinely gathered in educational settings, adults are dispersed across various environments and life stages, making it difficult to implement a uniform approach. This lack of a central point of contact or a structured environment requires innovative strategies to effectively engage adult learners”.³⁸³
154. Finally, stakeholders emphasised that there is no “one size fits all approach” to improving adults’ media literacy.³⁸⁴ Ofcom identified varying levels of confidence and ability to identify scams, search engine advertising, and sponsored social media posts across different ages, genders, socio-economic groups and nations.³⁸⁵ The Advertising Association and Media Smart similarly observed that:
- “Adults demonstrate extremely diverse baseline digital skills and media literacy levels. Some may be highly digitally competent but lack critical analysis skills, while others may struggle with basic digital navigation, creating challenges for delivering appropriate content.”³⁸⁶

376 Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050)

377 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049)

378 Written evidence from Sarah Pavey (MLI0021), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046), WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

379 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Shout Out UK (MLI0031) See also Ofcom, *Co-creating ways to navigate and mitigate against mis and disinformation* (May 2025), p 15: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/mis-and-disinformation/co-creating-ways-to-navigate-and-mitigate-against-mis-and-disinformation-verian-report.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

380 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), WISE KIDS (MLI0044), Mhor Collective (MLI0002)

381 Written evidence from HM Government (MLI0049)

382 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026), Dr Gianfranco Polizzi (MLI0045)

383 Written evidence from Shout Out UK (MLI0031)

384 Q 71 (Marc Davies); Written evidence from Ofcom (MLI0050), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040), HM Government (MLI0049)

385 Ofcom, *Adults’ Media Use and Attitudes Report* (May 2025), pp 8–10: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/adults/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-2025/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025.pdf> [accessed 3 July 2025]

386 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

155. Good Things Foundation underlined that some adults may need support with digital inclusion before they can progress to developing their media literacy skills.³⁸⁷ Stakeholders also identified that vulnerable groups, including women and girls, and marginalised communities are disproportionately affected by online harms, and may require targeted support.³⁸⁸
156. Ongoing challenges faced by the organisations delivering media literacy programmes relating to short-term funding, fragmentation and poor evaluation are examined in Chapter 3. Some witnesses highlighted that media literacy initiatives for adults tend to receive less funding than those aimed at children.³⁸⁹

Potential solutions

Media literacy “by stealth”

157. In order to overcome barriers related to awareness, confidence and differing abilities, witnesses underscored the importance of making media literacy training for adults relevant³⁹⁰ and connecting it to an immediate need, such as “evaluating health information, understanding data privacy, or navigating social media safely”.³⁹¹ Dr Stone outlined the need to find a “hook” in order to engage adults in conversation about media literacy, describing this as “media literacy by stealth”. She added: “In other words, you are not necessarily badging it as ‘Come here and get your media literacy’”.³⁹² Frances Yeoman, Head of Journalism at Liverpool John Moores University, agreed that:

“It is important that we talk to our audiences and to society about tangible skills, benefits and things that will be meaningful to them and have them engage”.³⁹³

158. Vicki Shotbolt, CEO of Parent Zone, told us that adults are looking for “really practical information”. She added:

“They want to know how media literacy skills might improve their lived daily lives. If it is about avoiding a scam, being able to sign up for a card that gets you a discount in Asda or any of those things, they suddenly start to engage and you can start to talk about things like, ‘Why do you think they are able to discount the prices so much? What’s so valuable about your data?’ You can open up a conversation.”³⁹⁴

Targeting parents

159. A number of witnesses identified parenting support as one such “hook” for delivering media literacy education to adults. The widespread reaction to the Netflix drama *Adolescence* exemplified the struggles that many parents

387 Written evidence from Good Things Foundation ([MLI0046](#))

388 Written evidence from Ofcom ([MLI0050](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), National Education Union ([MLI0055](#)), School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster ([MLI0012](#))

389 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

390 [Q 71](#) (Marc Davies), [Q 111](#) (Alistair Barfield); Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#)), Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#)), Cwmpas ([MLI0042](#)), The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#)), Good Things Foundation ([MLI0046](#))

391 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#))

392 [Q 71](#) (Dr Emma Stone)

393 [Q 164](#) (Frances Yeoman)

394 [Q 104](#)

face with both their own media literacy and that of their children.³⁹⁵ Matteo Bergamini MBE, CEO of Shout Out UK, told us that parents were willing to engage with opportunities to help their children learn, which in turn offers the “spillover benefit of learning themselves”.³⁹⁶ Ms Shotbolt agreed that, in seeking support for their children, parents could also develop their own media literacy skills:

“This is not just about parents developing skills to keep their children safer; it is parents developing skills that they need themselves ... talking about them in a way that allows parents to understand why they might be interested, so they therefore pass them on well to their children, gives you cut-through.”³⁹⁷

160. The Guardian Foundation identified an “openness from parents to learning media literacy skills when put in the context of helping their children”, adding that “evaluation shows that taking part in family workshops also develops [parents’] own skills.”³⁹⁸ Others agreed that family-focused or intergenerational programmes that support children alongside their parents and carers could be effective.³⁹⁹
161. Echoing the evidence we received from others, the parents we spoke to during our school visit appeared to have little familiarity with the term “media literacy”, though they expressed specifically a desire to support their children to evaluate the content and opinions they encounter online.⁴⁰⁰ The role of parents in supporting children and young people’s media literacy is explored further in Chapter 6.

Trusted faces in local places

162. We heard that media literacy education is best delivered through trusted local organisations and networks,⁴⁰¹ described by Good Things Foundation as “trusted faces in local places”.⁴⁰² The Advertising Association and Media Smart identified “significant value” in “building partnerships with organisations that have trusted relationships with underserved communities.”⁴⁰³
163. Dr Elinor Carmi, Senior Lecturer in Data Politics and Social Justice at City St George’s University of London, told us that “local and contextual projects would make more sense to people and their communities”,⁴⁰⁴ while

395 See, for example, ‘Drama shines light on ‘growing problem’—PM’, *BBC News* (19 March 2025): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd7ew52d2y3o>; ‘Boys to get anti-misogyny lessons as TV drama Adolescence hits home’, *The Times* (23 March 2025), available at: <https://www.thetimes.com/article/693cc94e-47ec-4e61-bd37-4cf24e6598f4>; ‘Unnervingly on-the-nose’: why Adolescence is such powerful TV that it could save lives’, *The Guardian* (17 March 2025): <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2025/mar/17/adolescence-netflix-powerful-tv-could-save-lives>

396 Q 109 (Matteo Bergamini)

397 Q 113

398 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

399 Q 110; Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MLI0033), WISE KIDS (MLI0044), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

400 See Appendix 5.

401 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), WISE KIDS (MLI0044), Ofcom (MLI0050), Dr Ana Cristina Suzina (MLI0022), Digital Resilience in Education Team, Welsh Government (MLI0037), Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

402 Written evidence from Good Things Foundation (MLI0046)

403 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

404 Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026)

the National Literacy Trust emphasised the role of “trusted messengers”.⁴⁰⁵ Parent Zone underlined the importance of delivering media literacy education “where adults are”, including “workplaces, asylum seeker hotels, domestic violence units, schools, libraries and even supermarkets”.⁴⁰⁶ Others cited religious settings, family hubs, community centres and cafes as potential locations for delivering media literacy training to adults.⁴⁰⁷

164. Libraries were seen as playing a “particularly noteworthy and important” role in delivering media literacy.⁴⁰⁸ They are “one of the last free community spaces people have”,⁴⁰⁹ while “librarians, as curators of information, have a long-established role in helping people to become more information literate”.⁴¹⁰ Stakeholders highlighted additional factors including: high trust in librarians;⁴¹¹ a wide public library network, made up of around 4,000 public libraries across the UK;⁴¹² and intergenerational appeal.⁴¹³ Dr Carmi championed the role of libraries in media literacy education for adults:

“Libraries are essential for media literacy programmes for adults because they can support those citizens outside of formal education with more accessible free spaces where professionals can assist and support citizens”.⁴¹⁴

165. Libraries already carry out or host media literacy activities.⁴¹⁵ Zoe Darmé, Director of Trust Strategy at Google Search, told us that Google had piloted its library-based Super Searchers programme in the UK, and that it was “exploring a partnership” with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) to further expand this training programme.⁴¹⁶ Under its 2021 Online Media Literacy Strategy,⁴¹⁷ the previous Government commissioned Libraries Connected to develop training on media literacy for library staff.⁴¹⁸
166. Recognising that “many people are not aware of their need for better media literacy and/or may prioritise other things”, Ofcom agreed that “media literacy education is often best delivered through services that people are already engaging with for other reasons”. The regulator similarly identified that “people are often more receptive to media literacy interventions when they are delivered by people and professionals they already know and trust.”⁴¹⁹ As noted in Chapter 3, Ofcom recommended “embedding media literacy

405 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#))

406 Written evidence from Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#))

407 [Q 69](#) (Dr Emma Stone); Written evidence from Dr François Nel ([MLI0005](#)), Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#))

408 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#)). See also written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0033](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#)), Dr Gianfranco Polizzi ([MLI0045](#))

409 Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi ([MLI0026](#))

410 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#))

411 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#)), Libraries Connected ([MLI0054](#))

412 Written evidence from Libraries Connected ([MLI0054](#))

413 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#))

414 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#))

415 Written evidence from Libraries Connected ([MLI0054](#))

416 [Q 143](#)

417 See Box 2.

418 Written evidence from Libraries Connected ([MLI0054](#))

419 Written evidence from Ofcom ([MLI0050](#))

interventions into the delivery of wider public services”, but suggested this was an area where “other actors”, including local and national Government, “have parts to play”.⁴²⁰

167. The Government also agreed that “the role of trusted local organisations and individuals is a key consideration in developing effective interventions to build media literacy”. It cited findings from the aftermath of the Southport tragedy that “low trust in official institutions made it difficult to combat misinformation, aligning with insights that delivery partner trust is key to media literacy success”. In addition, it noted that some local authorities have developed best practice for supporting their communities’ media literacy needs.⁴²¹
168. The Government’s digital inclusion action plan⁴²² recognised that adults need local digital skills support at “their points of need and points of contact with existing public services”. It described public libraries as “a vital part of the national and local ecosystem supporting digital inclusion” and highlighted best-practice case studies for digital inclusion work being carried out in public libraries.⁴²³
169. Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety at DSIT, reiterated these points, stating that “all the evidence and all the good practice is showing that community-led initiatives can be more effective than doing things from the Government.” She agreed that “libraries have a crucial role to play in media literacy”, because they are “at the heart of our communities and understand the issues”.⁴²⁴ Baroness Jones also emphasised that “organising lots of different community activities” is “resource intensive” for the Government, but added “arguably it is worth doing if it has the right effect.”⁴²⁵

Local infrastructure challenges

170. Ms Shotbolt observed, however, that the number of services through which media literacy education might be delivered to adults, including parents, had dwindled in recent years:

“We do not have the infrastructure to go to them as easily as we used to be able to through family information services, libraries, social services, job centres—all those places where you used to be able to go, hang out on a Wednesday afternoon and meet a group of parents”.⁴²⁶
171. Others noted that “hundreds” of public libraries have closed in the past decade, while others have limited their opening hours.⁴²⁷ Analysis conducted by the BBC Shared Data Unit in 2024 found that the UK “has lost one in 20

420 Written evidence from Ofcom ([MLI0050](#))

421 Written evidence from HM Government ([MLI0049](#))

422 See Box 5.

423 HM Government, *Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps* (February 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps> [accessed 21 July 2025]

424 [QQ 275, 279](#)

425 [Q 277](#)

426 [Q 113](#)

427 Written evidence from Sarah Pavey ([MLI0021](#)), Dr Elinor Carmi ([MLI0026](#)). See also House of Commons Library, *Future of public libraries*, Research Briefing, [cdp-2025-0097](#), 13 May 2025

libraries since 2016, either by closing them completely or moving them over to volunteer-run groups.”⁴²⁸

172. In addition, we heard that local professionals have “limited knowledge of media literacy” as well as “extremely busy workloads”.⁴²⁹ Ofcom’s research on ‘what works’ in media literacy found that community groups “did not always have the capacity to support projects due to funding and related staffing challenges”.⁴³⁰ The Guardian Foundation told us:

“Organisations providing frontline services (e.g. early-help groups) do recognise the importance of media literacy, but the demand for other urgent services (e.g. housing) means there is not capacity to also deliver media literacy interventions.”⁴³¹

Returning to the example of libraries, we heard that while librarians have existing expertise in serving communities’ information needs, further training was needed “to reflect technological and social developments”, including in AI.⁴³² Figures suggest that over 600 libraries across the UK are currently run by volunteers.⁴³³

173. Academics at LSE therefore advocated for investment in “crucial community infrastructures such as libraries, youth clubs, community centres, and lifelong learning services” to ensure that “media literacy training is accessible and universally available”.⁴³⁴ Dr Stone felt that “there is a role for the Government”, and potentially the regulator, to provide the “upskilling” that staff in libraries and community organisations need.⁴³⁵ Witnesses also highlighted the role of local and regional government in coordinating local delivery.⁴³⁶
174. **Media literacy is a vital life skill, but engaging adults in media literacy training is challenging. The public has low awareness of media literacy and its relevance to their daily lives. Our evidence emphasised the importance of media literacy training being delivered through existing trusted relationships within local communities. Framing media literacy training as a way to help parents to support their children to navigate their online environment may also encourage take-up.**
175. **The Government is right to identify the importance of supporting people’s digital skills at their points of interaction with public services. Libraries and librarians are particularly well placed to provide media literacy education for adults as they already serve**

428 BBC News, ‘Public libraries in ‘crisis’ as councils cut services’ (3 September 2024): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn9lwxplcl5o> [accessed 21 July 2025]

429 Written evidence from Parent Zone (MLI0014)

430 Ofcom, *What works in delivering media literacy activities* (September 2024), p 9: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/evaluate/what-works-in-media-literacy/what-works-in-delivering-media-literacy-activities2.pdf> [accessed 26 June 2025]

431 Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

432 Written evidence from Dr Elinor Carmi (MLI0026), Libraries Connected (MLI0054)

433 Public Libraries News, ‘List of UK volunteer libraries’: <https://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news/list-of-uk-volunteer-run-libraries> [accessed 1 July 2025]

434 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

435 Q 71

436 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040), Salford Business School (MLI0027)

the information and literacy needs of local communities. We were pleased to see the Government highlight the role of public libraries in its digital inclusion action plan.

176. **We support efforts to strengthen the ability of local organisations and public services to provide media literacy training. We restate that this must be seen as complementary to, but distinct from, digital inclusion initiatives. We recognise, however, that frontline services and community groups are already stretched in assisting users with other, urgent matters and have limited capacity to take on additional responsibilities.**
177. *The Government’s digital inclusion action plan should build media literacy competencies by enabling more consistent support—for example through leveraging platforms’ funding—for initiatives delivered locally or through public services. The Government must ensure that in relying on trusted local stakeholders for delivery, it does not place further strain on frontline services and community groups without providing additional funding and support.*

Improving public awareness

178. Several stakeholders suggested that a public awareness campaign could be effective in reaching audiences that are not otherwise engaged with media literacy or services through which it might be delivered.⁴³⁷ We heard this would “support all members of society to build their media literacy skills”.⁴³⁸ It would also be an effective method for reaching busy adults, especially if delivered through online platforms and media outlets.⁴³⁹ Mr Bergamini noted that “digital campaigns have a part to play”, as “adults spend a lot of time online”.⁴⁴⁰ Participants in Ofcom’s research on mitigating mis and disinformation recommended a combination of traditional and social media campaigns to reach different parts of the population. The study also highlighted the importance of simple, friendly and unfrontational messaging.⁴⁴¹
179. There are positive examples of public awareness campaigns being used in other countries. In Canada and Ireland, these leveraged both traditional and social media channels.⁴⁴² Martina Chapman, National Coordinator at Media Literacy Ireland, highlighted that the organisation’s Be Media Smart campaign “had a very simple call to action”. She noted too that while the campaign had strong cut-through:

“Raising awareness of an issue is one thing; actually helping people to take that step to make change in their lives or to develop skills is another.”⁴⁴³

437 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008), Shout Out UK (MLI0031), Internet Matters (MLI0039), WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

438 Written evidence from Internet Matters (MLI0039)

439 Written evidence from Shout Out UK (MLI0031), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

440 Q 110

441 Ofcom, *Co-creating ways to navigate and mitigate against mis and disinformation* (May 2025), pp 38–40: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/mis-and-disinformation/co-creating-ways-to-navigate-and-mitigate-against-mis-and-disinformation_verian-report.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]

442 QQ 47, 35

443 Q 35

180. Finland and Canada run annual Media Literacy Week campaigns—the latter as part of a wider UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy Week⁴⁴⁴—which encourage the public to “collectively strengthen media literacy skills”.⁴⁴⁵ We heard that in the UK Safer Internet Day provides a prompt for conversations about online safety and media literacy, as well as incorporating relevant activities into teaching in schools.⁴⁴⁶ This point was echoed during our visit to St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School.⁴⁴⁷
181. The National Literacy Trust, however, felt that time-bound initiatives are “valuable but limited”. They “must be part of a broader, sustained effort” in order to lead to “more meaningful and lasting improvements”.⁴⁴⁸ Mr Pekkala told us that in Finland, Media Literacy Week is accompanied by relevant training material and activities that “continue throughout the year”.⁴⁴⁹ Ofcom sought views on running a UK media literacy week when consulting on its three-year strategy, but “decided not to pursue the idea” due to a “lack of firm evidence” on its likely effectiveness.⁴⁵⁰
182. Speaking to the Youth Select Committee in December 2024, Baroness Jones said that the Government was planning a “widespread campaign” on media literacy.⁴⁵¹ She confirmed this intention when giving evidence to our inquiry, explaining that this would enable the Government to “reach many more communities than we have been able to at the moment”. She said the campaign will involve influencers and use terminology that is “jazzier” than simply ‘media literacy’.⁴⁵²
183. **We welcome the Government’s plan to increase understanding of media literacy among the general population through a public awareness campaign. However, a standalone campaign is unlikely to drive lasting behaviour change. This must be accompanied by sustained media literacy activity.**
184. *In designing its campaign, the Government should learn from international examples of best practice. Campaign messaging must be clear and direct audiences to additional resources and interventions providing more targeted, sustained support. The Government should adopt an annual Media Literacy Week as part of sustained, year-round activity on media literacy.*

444 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ‘Global Media and Information Literacy Week’: <https://www.unesco.org/en/weeks/media-information-literacy> [accessed 2 July 2025]

445 Written evidence from Wikimedia UK (MLI0017), Internet Matters (MLI0039). See also Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, ‘Cross-sectoral challenges to media literacy’ (August 2023), pp 27, 30: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651167fabf7c1a0011bb4660/cross-sectoral_challenges_to_media_literacy.pdf [accessed 21 July 2025]

446 Q 56 (Will Gardner), Q 129 (Laura Higgins), Q 168 (Frances Yeoman), QQ 196–97 (Cerys Griffiths); Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

447 See Appendix 5.

448 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

449 Q 18 (Leo Pekkala)

450 Ofcom, *Ofcom’s three-year media literacy strategy: Response to consultation responses* (October 2024), p 21: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/statement-ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy.pdf?v=382047> [accessed 2 July 2025]

451 Oral evidence taken before the Youth Select Committee, inquiry on social media and youth violence, 12 December 2024 (Session 2024–25), Q 50 (Baroness Jones)

452 QQ 254, 280

CHAPTER 6: MEDIA LITERACY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

185. Evidence to our inquiry put forward a strong case for comprehensive media literacy education for children, both to protect them from harms, and to instil the critical thinking, civic engagement and digital skills they will need for the future.⁴⁵³ This chapter assesses the current state of media literacy education in schools and options for improvement. It then examines how children's media literacy skills could be developed outside school settings.

Media literacy education in schools

186. Witnesses argued that effective media literacy in schools is “the best avenue through which to teach children media literacy skills at scale”,⁴⁵⁴ as well as a key lever for improving media literacy across the population as a whole.⁴⁵⁵

Good media literacy education

187. Shout Out UK echoed the views of many others in its statement that:
- “Good media literacy education is characterised by sustained and repeated engagement, interwoven throughout the school curriculum across all subjects ... This approach ensures that young people develop a comprehensive understanding of media analysis and critical thinking, rather than viewing it as an isolated topic or only pertinent to certain subjects.”⁴⁵⁶
188. Finland and Canada were often highlighted as countries that had adopted a successful, cross-curricular approach.⁴⁵⁷ Witnesses also drew attention to the introduction of ‘digital competence’ in the revised Curriculum for Wales;⁴⁵⁸ it is positioned as a mandatory cross-curricular skill that incorporates media literacy outcomes and has the same status as literacy and numeracy.⁴⁵⁹

453 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Common Sense Media ([MLI0011](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#)), Ukie ([MLI0035](#)), Media Education Association ([MLI0035](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#)), Ofcom ([MLI0050](#))

454 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

455 [Q 174](#) (Elli Narewska); Written evidence from Frances Yeoman ([MLI0013](#)), Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#))

456 Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#))

457 [Q 46](#) (Matthew Johnson); Written evidence from Mhor Collective ([MLI0002](#)), Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#))

458 [QQ 222, 224](#) (Kate Davies); Written evidence from The National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Frances Yeoman ([MLI0013](#)), Into Film ([MLI0041](#)), Cwmpas ([MLI0042](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

459 Welsh Government, ‘Cross-curricular skills frameworks’: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/cross-curricular-skills-frameworks/#overview> [accessed 17 July 2025]

Box 7: Media literacy education in Finland

Media literacy is comprehensively embedded throughout Finland's educational system, in both primary and secondary education. Media literacy skills are fostered through a focus on 'multiliteracy', one of seven cross-curricular competencies that is promoted in the instruction of every subject. This focuses on students' capacity to read and interpret audiovisual information, as well as produce their own. Elements of media literacy are also included under the 'ICT competence' strand of the curriculum. Guidance materials and competence descriptions are provided to teachers, but they have autonomy over how they incorporate media literacy education within their subject.

Source: Finnish National Agency for Education: 'Multiliteracy and Media Literacy': <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/multiliteracy-and-media-literacy> [accessed 3 July 2025]

189. Internet Matters underlined that media literacy education “should be embedded from the start of education and transition across all key stages”.⁴⁶⁰ Other stakeholders agreed, arguing that children should begin developing media literacy skills at age five or even during the preschool phase⁴⁶¹ and again pointing to Finland as an exemplar.⁴⁶² Witnesses set out how media literacy education can be adapted to ensure age-appropriateness, progressing from story-telling and play-based learning approaches during the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and key stage 1, to the development of increasingly sophisticated critical evaluation and content creation skills as children progress through primary and secondary school.⁴⁶³
190. Alongside these structural elements, witnesses highlighted examples of successful pedagogical approaches to media literacy education. These include peer-to-peer learning models,⁴⁶⁴ such as the Guardian Foundation's Media Ambassador Programme,⁴⁶⁵ as well as opportunities for students to create their own media.⁴⁶⁶ Others noted the important role that school libraries and librarians can play.⁴⁶⁷

460 Written evidence from Internet Matters (MLI0039)

461 Written evidence from Digital Standards for Early Years Children (Birth to Five) Action Group (MLI0010), Common Sense Media (MLI0011), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

462 Q 2 (Prof Sander van der Linden), Q 56 (Chris Morris); Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023)

463 Written evidence from Digital Standards for Early Years Children (Birth to Five) Action Group (MLI0010), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043)

464 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), WISE KIDS (MLI0044), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043), National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

465 See para 118.

466 Written evidence from Common Sense Media (MLI0011), ConnectFutures (MLI0016), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Ukie (MLI0035), Media Education Association (MLI0038)

467 Written evidence from Sarah Pavey (MLI0021), Media Information Literacy Alliance (MLI0033)

Box 8: Case study: Common Sense Media’s digital citizenship curriculum

The organisation Common Sense Media has developed a curriculum of digital citizenship resources for use in schools in England, from the EYFS through to Year 13. Its progression document maps how these resources, which include a strand focused on media literacy skills, align to the national curriculum and the Education for a Connected World Framework.⁴⁶⁸ Common Sense Media has partnered with the London Borough of Islington to implement the programme in its schools,⁴⁶⁹ with the aim of refreshing the existing scheme of work for online safety, which was felt to be “outdated” and “too wordy”.⁴⁷⁰

In partnership with Common Sense Media, a team from LSE’s Department of Media and Communications secured funding from DSIT to evaluate the impact of the digital citizenship materials and their teaching on pupils’ media literacy and digital citizenship. The study, conducted in 2023 across four schools, identified “consistent improvement across all schools and all age cohorts” following the teaching of the curriculum “for as little as six weeks”.⁴⁷¹

Following the study, LSE recommended that explorations of digital citizenship topics in schools should be “central to the school’s curriculum” and “spread ... across subjects throughout term-time in a creative format”. It also highlighted the need for resources to be updated regularly, stating that they “cannot afford to become outdated or irrelevant”, and the importance of continuing professional development for teachers on “new and emerging media and social media”.⁴⁷²

Current media literacy provision

191. Commenting on current provision in schools, the charity Parent Zone argued that:

“There is minimal media literacy education in schools in England, with many schools doing little or no work in this area.”⁴⁷³

Wikimedia UK agreed, describing current provision as “patchy at best” in secondary schools and “almost non-existent within primary schools”.⁴⁷⁴ Others characterised it as a “postcode lottery”⁴⁷⁵ that depends on the discretion and enthusiasm of individual teachers and schools.⁴⁷⁶

468 Common Sense Education, ‘Digital Citizenship Year 1-13 Progression’: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rvyAco3rT7QE5GdVQMjpGMOBwEfC_hvXHTYiTZ4ecq4/edit?tab=t.0 [accessed 3 July 2025]

469 Including St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, which the Committee visited during our inquiry.

470 Common Sense Education, ‘Islington’: <https://www.common sense.org/education/uk/islington> [accessed 3 July 2025]

471 London School of Economics and Political Science, *LSE – Common Sense Digital Citizenship Curriculum Evaluation* (June 2024), pp 9, 14: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/projects/LSE-%E2%80%94-Common-Sense-Digital-Citizenship-Curriculum-Evaluation-Report.pdf> [accessed 3 July 2025]

472 *Ibid.*, pp 11–12

473 Written evidence from Parent Zone (MLI0014). Education, training and skills are devolved matters. Much of the evidence we received, and the corresponding conclusions and recommendations we have drawn, therefore focus on the situation in England.

474 Written evidence from Wikimedia UK (MLI0017)

475 Written evidence from WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

476 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster (MLI0012), Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023), Media Education Association (MLI0038), Dr Gianfranco Polizzi (MLI0045)

192. Referencing findings from a recent survey it had conducted, First News told us that while 83 per cent of teachers say media and information literacy is important or very important, 61 per cent say it is not currently taught at their school.⁴⁷⁷ In contrast, the Government cited survey data which indicated that “a majority” of year 6 parents were confident that their children were being taught aspects of media literacy, including using and sharing media, as well as fact-checking.⁴⁷⁸

Box 9: Media literacy education in the national curriculum

According to the Government, media literacy is currently covered in the national curriculum in England through:

- citizenship, which supports pupils to “distinguish fact from opinion, understand freedom of speech, and recognise the media’s role in shaping public opinion”;
- relationships, sex and health education (RSHE), which focuses on enabling pupils to “critically evaluate online relationships and information sources, understand data generation and use, and become discerning consumers of online information”;
- computing, which covers online safety and supporting pupils to “be discerning users of information technology and evaluate digital content”; and
- English, in particular the current English language GCSE, which “equips students with critical reading and comprehension skills”.⁴⁷⁹

It is also covered in GCSE media studies.⁴⁸⁰ In addition, “elements of media literacy” may be taught through “ad-hoc assemblies, form time or in reaction to behaviour or safeguarding incidents.”⁴⁸¹

193. Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister for School Standards, argued that media literacy is already “embedded across the curriculum”.⁴⁸² In contrast, witnesses told us that at present “elements of media literacy are scattered across subjects”,⁴⁸³ rather than being systematically integrated into the curriculum.⁴⁸⁴ Guidance for teachers and school leaders is “split across at least 13 statutory and non-statutory documents”⁴⁸⁵ and provides only minimal detail on what should be taught.⁴⁸⁶ We heard that teaching is, therefore,

“fragmented ... with some learning objectives heavily overlapping across subjects, while other key knowledge areas and competencies are overlooked altogether.”⁴⁸⁷

477 Written evidence from First News ([MLI0018](#))

478 Written evidence from HM Government ([MLI0049](#))

479 Written evidence from HM Government ([MLI0049](#))

480 Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham ([MLI0001](#)), Media Education Association ([MLI0038](#))

481 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

482 [Q 265](#)

483 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster ([MLI0012](#))

484 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster ([MLI0012](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#))

485 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

486 Written evidence from Association for Citizenship Teaching ([MLI0030](#)), Media Information and Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#))

487 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

As a result, pupils “fail to develop a holistic understanding”.⁴⁸⁸

194. The positioning of media literacy “primarily within” RSHE and computing also creates issues, according to the Advertising Association and Media Smart, “as these subjects often receive less dedicated time than core subjects.”⁴⁸⁹ The Media Education Association (MEA) argued that situating media literacy education in these subjects is “tokenistic”, since they are “already dealing with too much content”.⁴⁹⁰ Raising a similar point, the Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA) drew attention to findings from a recent Ofsted annual report that “the curriculum offer in citizenship does not typically match the scope and ambition of the national curriculum”.⁴⁹¹ The number of pupils taking a GCSE in citizenship has declined, as has the take-up of media studies GCSE.⁴⁹²
195. Turning to English, the MEA told us that in a 2023 survey of key stage 3 teachers most respondents felt that “media literacy is either absent or insufficiently addressed in English lessons”.⁴⁹³ At key stage 4, there is only “a limited focus on media literacy” within GCSE English courses and these “do not sufficiently engage students with media and digital texts”.⁴⁹⁴ Witnesses highlighted that media education, including analysis of ‘transient texts’ such as radio transcripts and websites, was removed from the English language GCSE as part of the 2014 reforms.⁴⁹⁵
196. Witnesses also drew attention to wider challenges facing the curriculum. The National Education Union, for example, argued that:
- “The curriculum in our schools and colleges has been narrowed by underfunding and Government performance targets in ‘core’ subjects ... These pressures squeeze out time for a broader range of curriculum subjects, activities and skills”.⁴⁹⁶
- Ukie, the video games industry body, raised similar points, highlighting in particular the decline in take-up of creative and digital subjects at GCSE and A-Level.⁴⁹⁷ The MEA spoke of “a narrow curriculum and a culture of high stakes testing”. It stated that, as a result:

488 Written evidence from School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster (MLI0012)

489 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart (MLI0023). At key stage 4, when most pupils are working towards GCSE qualifications, computing and citizenship are described in the national curriculum as “foundation” rather than “core” subjects. Schools “must also provide” RSHE teaching in this phase. They are not assessed as part of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), an accountability measure that is used to assess schools’ performance. HM Government, ‘The national curriculum: Key stage 3 and 4’: <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/key-stage-3-and-4> [accessed 21 July 2025]; Department for Education, ‘Guidance: English Baccalaureate (EBacc)’: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc> [accessed 21 July 2025]

490 Written evidence from Media Education Association (MLI0038)

491 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MLI0033)

492 Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham (MLI0001), Association for Citizenship Teaching (MLI0031), Media Education Association (MLI0038)

493 Written evidence from Media Education Association (MLI0038)

494 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust (MLI0008)

495 QQ 88, 91 (Clare Pollard); Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham (MLI0001)

496 Written evidence from National Education Union (MLI0055)

497 Written evidence from Ukie (MLI0035)

“Schools will often simply be forced to ignore media education because it is not assessed through performance measures, inspected by Ofsted and not currently statutory.”⁴⁹⁸

197. Reflecting on their own experiences of media literacy education, several members of the Youth Select Committee reported that media literacy had been taught only sporadically, often as part of one-off lessons or assemblies that focused primarily on online safety-related issues.⁴⁹⁹ They reiterated the call set out in their recent report on youth violence and social media for media literacy to be embedded across the national curriculum.⁵⁰⁰

Options for improvement

198. In examining options for improving media literacy education, we heard overwhelming support for it to be integrated more systematically into the national curriculum.⁵⁰¹ MILA told us that this means not only reinforcing the status of media literacy “in key subjects where it has traditionally been taught, such as media studies, citizenship and English”, but recognising its relevance “in a wide range of subjects where it either does not properly feature at present, or does so in an ad hoc, uncoordinated way.”⁵⁰²
199. We heard suggestions for how media literacy teaching could be incorporated across a broader set of subjects, including history and science.⁵⁰³ A member of the Youth Select Committee shared a positive real-life example of how media literacy had been integrated into their economics lessons, describing how their teacher encouraged the class to examine how financial news stories had been covered by different media outlets.⁵⁰⁴
200. Witnesses stressed that media literacy should also be anchored in a core subject, most likely English, rather than a “catch-all” or optional subject such as citizenship or computing.⁵⁰⁵ Carolyn Bunting MBE, Co-CEO of Internet Matters, and Claire Pollard, executive board member at the Media Education Association, highlighted that at key stage 4 around 20,000 pupils take GCSE computing compared to more than 800,000 for GCSE English language.⁵⁰⁶
201. We heard specific calls for the GCSE English language curriculum itself to be updated. The National Literacy Trust recommended that it should “incorporate the analysis of various media forms (e.g., websites, advertisements, and social media) to help students understand how language and meaning are constructed in digital spaces.” It also called for GCSE assessments to “move beyond formulaic essay writing to incorporate a

498 Written evidence from Media Education Association ([MLI0038](#))

499 See Appendix 4.

500 Youth Select Committee, *Youth Violence and Social Media* (2024), p 32: <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/hc-999-youth-violence-and-social-media-online.pdf> [accessed 21 July 2025]

501 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Common Sense Media UK ([MLI0011](#)), Wikimedia UK ([MLI0017](#)), Sarah Pavey ([MLI0021](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#)), Into Film ([MLI0041](#)), The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

502 Written evidence from Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#))

503 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

504 See Appendix 4.

505 [Q 92](#) (Carolyn Bunting); Written evidence from Prof David Buckingham ([MLI0001](#))

506 [Q 92](#)

broader range of tasks, such as evaluating digital sources and responding to online misinformation.”⁵⁰⁷

202. Finally, some witnesses advocated for the development of a media literacy ‘framework’ that would set out clearer competencies, with the National Literacy Trust referencing the national reading framework as a model.⁵⁰⁸ Another proposal was that media literacy could be coordinated across the curriculum by a teacher with paid responsibility for overseeing this within their school.⁵⁰⁹ Some witnesses suggested that media literacy could be included in Ofsted inspection criteria in the future.⁵¹⁰
203. **Engaging children and young people with media literacy during their time at school is a vital means of improving media literacy skills across the UK population. Unfortunately, witnesses painted a negative picture of the current levels of provision of media literacy education in English schools.**
204. **The evidence we received overwhelmingly supported enhancing the coverage of media literacy in the national curriculum and ensuring it is integrated within a number of subjects. Witnesses also highlighted a need for media literacy education to be rooted in a core subject to ensure universal provision, and for it to be taught from the preschool phase onwards.**

The curriculum and assessment review

205. Responding to the concerns described above, Ms McKinnell noted that the Government is currently awaiting the outcome of the independent curriculum and assessment review.⁵¹¹ In our report on the future of news, we recommended that the Government should “use the opportunity” of this review to “ensure that media literacy is given more time and prominence in schools.”⁵¹²

507 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#))

508 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#)), Into Film ([MLI0041](#))

509 [Q 91](#) (Claire Pollard)

510 Written evidence from Wikimedia UK ([MLI0017](#)), Media and Information Literacy Alliance ([MLI0033](#)), Media Education Association ([MLI0038](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

511 [Q 264](#)

512 *The future of news*, para 192

Box 10: The curriculum and assessment review

In July 2024, the Government commissioned Professor Becky Francis CBE to convene and chair a panel of experts to conduct a review of the existing national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England from key stage 1 through to key stage 5.⁵¹³ The terms of reference for the review set out that it will aim to “refresh the curriculum to ensure it is cutting edge, fit for purpose and meeting the needs of children and young people to support their future life and work”.⁵¹⁴ The review included a call for evidence, which closed in November 2024,⁵¹⁵ and is expected to publish its final report in autumn 2025.

206. The interim report of the review was published in March 2025.⁵¹⁶ This noted that:

“Digital skills, media literacy, online relationships and safe and respectful use of technology are covered within the computing and RSHE curriculums, and there is alignment between both programmes of study.”

It also stated, however, that the curriculum must “keep pace” with social and technological change, specifically mentioning that “the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and trends in digital information demand heightened media literacy and critical thinking, as well as digital skills”.⁵¹⁷

207. In light of the need for a “renewed focus on digital and media literacy”, the report said the review’s ongoing work will consider:

“whether there is sufficient coverage of these (and other) areas of knowledge and skills within subjects ... This could involve further embedding various knowledge and skills across different parts of the curriculum”.⁵¹⁸

Government ministers have asserted on several occasions that concerns regarding existing provision of media literacy education will be addressed by the review.⁵¹⁹ Contributors to our inquiry shared this view.⁵²⁰ In a joint statement published in June 2025, 14 stakeholder organisations reiterated their hope that as a result of the review media and information literacy “will

513 Department for Education, ‘Government launches Curriculum and Assessment Review’ (July 2024): <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-curriculum-and-assessment-review> [accessed 2 July 2025]

514 Department for Education, *Curriculum and Assessment Review: Review Aims, Terms of Reference and Working Principles* (July 2024), p 1: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d196b7d107658faec7e3db/Curriculum_and_assessment_review_-_aims_terms_of_reference_and_working_principles.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]

515 Department for Education, ‘Call for evidence: Curriculum and Assessment Review’: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/curriculum-and-assessment-team/curriculum-and-assessment-review-call-for-evidence/> [accessed 2 July 2025]

516 Q 55 (Hannah Perry)

517 Curriculum and Assessment Review, *Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim report* (March 2025), pp 7, 26–27: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67d9617b594182179fe08778/Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review_interim_report.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]

518 *Ibid.*, p 27

519 QQ 269, 272 (Catherine McKinnell MP); HL Deb, 30 April 2025, cols 1218–19 [Lords Chamber]; HL Deb, 22 May 2025, cols 355–57 [Lords Chamber]; Oral evidence taken before the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee on 29 April 2025 (Session 2024–25), Q 335 (Baroness Jones of Whitchurch)

520 Q 58 (Hannah Perry); Written evidence from Frances Yeoman (MLI0013), Internet Matters (MLI0039), The Guardian Foundation (MLI0043), Dr Gianfranco Polizzi (MLI0045), Full Fact (MLI0047)

be properly addressed in the revised school curriculum in England, and in the assessment framework that will consequently be put in place”.⁵²¹

208. **As we identified in our recent report on the future of news, the Government’s ongoing curriculum and assessment review provides an ideal opportunity to enhance coverage of media literacy within the national curriculum. We welcome statements from Government ministers, and the conclusions of the review’s interim report, which suggest that media literacy will be a priority area of focus in the remaining phases of the review.**
209. *In addressing any related findings from the curriculum and assessment review, the Government must ensure that media literacy is embedded across the national curriculum in a way that guarantees consistent, repeated engagement with the topic for all pupils.*
210. *It should also update the GCSE English Language curriculum to include media literacy skills development more explicitly and enable a wider range of media formats to be used as set texts.*
211. *Finally, the Government should work with Ofsted to ensure that the delivery of cross-curricular media literacy teaching is included in the schools inspection framework.*

Support for teachers

212. Witnesses frequently highlighted that teachers do not feel well equipped to teach media literacy or have difficult conversations on topics relating to online safety.⁵²² According to polling conducted by First News, only five per cent of teachers reported that they “would feel very confident teaching it”.⁵²³ We heard that teachers feel particularly underprepared in relation to “fast-evolving areas such as AI, disinformation, and online harms.”⁵²⁴ ConnectFutures described an overreliance on younger teachers to teach media literacy, without the provision of adequate training, “based on the assumption that their familiarity with digital technology equates to expertise in the subject”.⁵²⁵
213. Cerys Griffiths, Creative Director for Education at the BBC, explained that since media literacy is not “embedded into the curriculum as a subject that they have to teach”, teachers have to manage discussions relating to it “in a reactive way”.⁵²⁶ Likewise, Hannah Perry, Associate Director, Information Ecosystems at Demos, spoke of teachers “constantly dialling into different current affairs knowledge” in order to respond to “what students are consuming in that moment”.⁵²⁷ The National Education Union told us: “Teachers are having to address racist and misogynistic views that young people are holding because of online content.” Combined with workload

521 Media and Information Literacy Alliance, *Joint statement on Curriculum and Assessment Review interim report* (June 2025): <https://mila.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Curriculum-Review-interim-report-joint-response.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2025]

522 Written evidence from François Nel (MLI0005), University of Westminster (MLI0012), Internet Matters (MLI0039)

523 Written evidence from First News (MLI0018)

524 Written evidence from WISE KIDS (MLI0044)

525 Written evidence from ConnectFutures (MLI0016)

526 Q 195

527 Q 66

pressures, it argued, this contributes to ongoing teacher recruitment and retention challenges.⁵²⁸

214. Shout Out UK told us that the fact that media literacy is not integrated into the curriculum also means that “teachers generally lack specific training in this area”.⁵²⁹ The absence of guidance and teacher training on media literacy, both in initial qualifications and continuing professional development (CPD), was highlighted by many others.⁵³⁰ Ms Bunting reported research suggesting that “30 per cent of teachers cite a lack of relevant training as a barrier to delivering effective media literacy.”⁵³¹ The teachers we met at St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School agreed that teachers would need additional support, through both initial teacher training and CPD, to better incorporate critical thinking skills across the curriculum.⁵³²
215. Ofcom has identified teacher training as a “key way” it can meet its duty of increasing UK media literacy. In February 2025 it reported the findings of a mapping exercise that aimed to assess the extent to which its media literacy outcomes⁵³³ were covered in existing CPD and where there were gaps. The audit found that for two outcomes—“critical thinking about content” and being “digital and media savvy”—“there exists a shared understanding of the skills that are central to media literacy”. In contrast, “training teachers to develop the more active, creative aspect of media literacy is a significant gap”. Ofcom also stated:

“A highly significant finding from this research is that all respondents agreed that the lack of either a curriculum location (either as a subject in its own right or as a statutory cross-curricular topic) or a mandate for media literacy is a barrier to engagement and that, therefore, media literacy needs to be statutory and aligned to curriculum, and more than a ‘tick box exercise’.”⁵³⁴
216. We heard that teacher training should be frequently updated and reinforced to help teachers build confidence with digital topics.⁵³⁵ Stakeholders also highlighted the need for resources that are up-to-date, as well as those targeted at specific groups, such as those with special educational needs.⁵³⁶ As discussed above, the BBC argued that it is “uniquely placed” to provide a

528 Written evidence from National Education Union ([MLI0055](#))

529 Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#))

530 Written evidence from Mhor Collective ([MLI0002](#)), Prof Robert Beveridge ([MLI0007](#)), Wikimedia UK ([MLI0017](#)), First News ([MLI0018](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Manchester Institute of Education ([MLI0024](#)), Cwmpas ([MLI0023](#)), The Guardian Foundation, ([MLI0043](#)), Dr Gianfranco Polizzi ([MLI0045](#))

531 [Q 93](#) (Carolyn Bunting)

532 See Appendix 5.

533 Ofcom developed a list of 24 outcomes describing media literate behaviours, to assist practitioners in the evaluation of their interventions. See Ofcom, *Evaluation Toolkit: Outcomes, indicators and survey questions bank* (September 2024), p 7: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/evaluate/toolkit/outcomes-indicators-and-survey-questions-bank.pdf?v=379341> [accessed 25 June 2025]

534 Ofcom, ‘A teachable moment: opportunities, gaps and next steps from our review of media literacy training for teachers’: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-literacy/a-teachable-moment> [accessed 25 June 2025]

535 Written evidence from Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#)), Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science ([MLI0040](#)), Into Film ([MLI0041](#)), The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#))

536 Written evidence from Into Film ([MLI0041](#)), The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#))

media literacy course for use in schools due to its expertise across education and news, and its status as a trusted public service media company.⁵³⁷

217. On resources, Ms McKinnell stated:

“There has been a clear ask from the sector for the Department for Education to create online materials to help educators be able to teach about the use of digital and AI effectively. That is something we have responded to and produced toolkits and other support for teachers.”⁵³⁸

She also assured us that teachers will have “the best-quality training, best-quality support and ongoing professional development to support them to teach what will be a new curriculum when we roll it out.”⁵³⁹ She drew attention to efforts to improve the quality of initial teacher training to ensure it offers “a high-quality framework for all teachers”.⁵⁴⁰

218. **At present, teachers lack the skills and confidence to deliver media literacy education in a way that is relevant to their students’ experience of media. Relying on younger teachers’ knowledge of social media and current trends is insufficient.**

219. *Initial teacher training and continuous professional development should be updated to incorporate media literacy, to ensure that teachers feel better equipped to deliver lessons on this topic. The design of a teacher training programme should be informed by previous pilot schemes and should leverage the expertise of subject associations and media literacy organisations.*

220. *Greater efforts are needed to make teachers aware of the support that is available from a variety of media and voluntary organisations. The Department for Education should collaborate with media organisations, including the BBC, to develop age-appropriate resources to support the delivery of media literacy education in schools.*

Smartphones in schools

221. During our inquiry, the launch of the Netflix series “Adolescence” drew further public attention to the risks posed by harmful material online and the ongoing debate regarding children’s access to smartphones and social

537 See para 142.

538 [Q 266](#)

539 [Q 267](#)

540 [QQ 281–82](#)

media.⁵⁴¹ Countries such as France and Australia have recently taken steps to strengthen their policies in this area.⁵⁴² As Ms Bunting put it:

“We are having this conversation about media literacy in schools when, across the country, parents are having conversations about banning smartphones, banning social media and preventing children from getting on that technology in the first place.”

222. In her view, “schools should very much have a responsibility in this space”. Some witnesses highlighted that most schools already restrict students’ use of phones.⁵⁴³ The Government has published non-statutory guidance for schools on “how to develop, implement and maintain a policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones throughout the school day”.⁵⁴⁴ The House of Commons Education Committee recommended that the Government monitor the implementation of this guidance, and consider introducing a statutory ban if the current guidance proves ineffective.⁵⁴⁵ While some witnesses warned that a ban in schools could have a “chilling effect” on media literacy teaching,⁵⁴⁶ others emphasised that it was not necessary to have mobile phones in the classroom to teach media literacy.⁵⁴⁷

223. Chris Morris, CEO of Full Fact, suggested that his organisation “would support” preventing the use of phones in schools. However, he added:

“Where I think we have a problem is if you try to go further and ban social media altogether; there are moves, for example in Australia, to do that. I just do not think it is realistic. If you ban something, it will go underground”.⁵⁴⁸

224. Matteo Bergamini MBE, CEO of Shout Out UK, similarly described calls to ban technology as “a bit of a worrying trend”. He explained:

“It does not resolve anything to have this negative view of technology; actually, we should be encouraging parents to go online with their kids. If you do it when they are a young age on something like YouTube Kids ... you not only demystify the online space for parents but make it a topic of conversation at places like the dinner table”.⁵⁴⁹

541 See, for example, BBC News, ‘Drama shines light on “growing problem”—PM’ (19 March 2025): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd7ew52d2y3o>; ‘Boys to get anti-misogyny lessons as TV drama Adolescence hits home’, *The Times* (23 March 2025), available at: <https://www.thetimes.com/article/693cc94e-47ec-4e61-bd37-4cf24e6598f4>; ‘3,500 Kent parents sign Smartphone Free Childhood pact as writer of Netflix hit Adolescence demands government action’, *Kent Online* (20 March 2025): <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/folkestone/news/netflix-s-adolescence-sparks-spike-in-kent-parents-stopping-321673/> [accessed 21 July 2025]

542 ‘France to tighten mobile phone ban in middle schools’, *The Guardian* (10 April 2025): <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/10/france-mobile-phone-ban-middle-schools>; In November 2024, the Australian Parliament passed the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024. The Act establishes a minimum age of 16 for users to hold a social media account and requires platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent age-restricted users from accessing their services. See *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024*

543 Q 66 (Will Gardner, Hannah Perry); See also Education Committee, *Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing* (Fourth Report, Session 2023–24, HC 118)

544 Department for Education, Mobile phones in schools (February 2024): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cf5f2a4239310011b7b916/Mobile_phones_in_schools_guidance.pdf [accessed 8 July 2025]

545 Education Committee, *Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing* para 43

546 Written evidence from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (MLI0040)

547 Q 67

548 Q 65

549 Q 110

225. The parents and teachers we spoke to during our visit in June expressed similar views, emphasising that regulated access to devices is a necessary part of enabling children to develop digital skills and navigate the online environment safely.⁵⁵⁰ Will Gardner OBE, CEO of Childnet, told us that a complete ban could be seen as “almost like punishing young people for the failure of companies”.⁵⁵¹ Members of the Youth Select Committee raised similar points⁵⁵² and restated the conclusion from their report, which argued that a social media ban for under-16s would “prevent many young people from accessing the benefits of social media and would do little to make social media websites safer for young people”.⁵⁵³

Media literacy education outside school settings

226. We heard that “improving media literacy requires a holistic approach that takes place in both formal and informal contexts for learning”.⁵⁵⁴ Mhor Collective, a Scottish social enterprise, observed that “young people are more receptive to learning in informal settings”,⁵⁵⁵ while WISE KIDS argued that:

“Some of the most meaningful learning happens outside the classroom. Community-based, youth-led, and informal settings offer rich opportunities to engage children and young people in ways that are creative, participatory, and directly relevant to their lives.”⁵⁵⁶

The charity noted that partnering with local authorities or youth services could provide targeted programmes for vulnerable children. We heard that care-experienced children, as well as those with additional educational needs, would benefit from specific support.⁵⁵⁷

227. Other stakeholders mentioned the role that online influencers, video games and content creators could play in helping children develop media literacy skills.⁵⁵⁸ Witnesses also highlighted that informal learning could take place in youth clubs, libraries, sports teams or cultural venues.⁵⁵⁹ Members of the Youth Select Committee emphasised the role of youth services in providing opportunities for young people to learn from each other and discuss complicated topics in an informal setting. As discussed in Chapter 5, however, libraries and other community infrastructure face resource and capacity constraints in delivering or hosting media literacy activity in addition to existing responsibilities.⁵⁶⁰

550 See Appendix 5.

551 [Q 66](#)

552 See Appendix 4.

553 Youth Select Committee, *Youth Violence and Social Media* (2024), p 16: <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/hc-999-youth-violence-and-social-media-online.pdf> [accessed 21 July 2025]

554 Written evidence from Prof Ruth Page, Dr Alex Christiansen, Michael Larkin, Dr Shioma-Lei Craythorne, Prof Paul Crawford, Emma Garavini and Eva Asiedu-Addo ([MLI0015](#))

555 Written evidence from Mhor Collective ([MLI0002](#))

556 Written evidence from WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

557 Written evidence from Mhor Collective ([MLI0002](#)), National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

558 Written evidence from Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Shout Out UK ([MLI0031](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

559 [Q 102](#) (Alistair Barfield), [Q 114](#) (Vicki Shotbolt); Written evidence from Mhor Collective ([MLI0002](#)), National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Advertising Association and Media Smart ([MLI0023](#)), Cwmpas ([MLI0043](#)), WISE KIDS ([MLI0044](#))

560 See paras 170–173.

Parents and carers

228. Stakeholders told us that parents and carers are an important source of media literacy education for young people.⁵⁶¹ Vicki Shotbolt, CEO of Parent Zone, told us:

“The most obvious way to reach children is through their parents. Parents are the single biggest unpaid workforce that we have, and they are the people that look after children for all the hours that children are not in school. So, if you focus on the parents, you will in effect reach children more directly ... that should be the place that we focus our attention.”⁵⁶²

229. Alistair Barfield, an independent media literacy practitioner, agreed that “there is no point in equipping young people if we cannot equip the parents to help them discern that content”.⁵⁶³ The teachers we spoke to during our visit likewise emphasised the important role that parents have to play.⁵⁶⁴ While some stakeholders suggested that schools could provide greater parental outreach,⁵⁶⁵ others warned that schools have limited capacity to do so, and parents may struggle to attend workshops in school hours.⁵⁶⁶
230. We heard that parents’ role in delivering media literacy education was particularly important in the early years phase, when parents are “their children’s first educators”.⁵⁶⁷ According to Ofcom, the proportion of children aged three to five using social media has increased from 29 per cent in 2023 to 37 percent in 2024.⁵⁶⁸ However, witnesses highlighted a gap in research and resources on media literacy in early years.⁵⁶⁹ Katy Potts, Computing and Online Safety Lead for Schools at Islington Council, voiced concerns that very little guidance and standards are available for what “good” media literacy looks like for this age group.⁵⁷⁰ Finland and Australia were cited as examples of countries where media literacy education begins at a very young age.⁵⁷¹
231. Despite challenges engaging adults in media literacy education, parents are keen to support their children’s media literacy skills.⁵⁷² The parents we spoke to during our visit to St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School expressed concerns about the unverified information and extreme views their children encountered online and discussed ways to support them to evaluate these effectively.⁵⁷³

561 Written evidence from Common Sense Media ([MLI0011](#)), Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#)), Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#)), Full Fact ([MLI0047](#))

562 [Q 114](#)

563 [Q 107](#)

564 See Appendix 5.

565 Written evidence from Internet Matters ([MLI0039](#))

566 [Q 105](#) (Matteo Bergamini), [Q 113](#) (Vicki Shotbolt); Written evidence from Media Education Association ([MLI0038](#))

567 Written evidence from Dr Julia Gillen ([MLI0003](#))

568 Ofcom, *Children and Parents Media Use and Attitudes Report* (May 2025), p 22: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/children/childrens-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025/childrens-media-literacy-report-2025.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2025]

569 Written evidence from National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Parent Zone ([MLI0014](#))

570 Written evidence from Katy Potts ([MLI0010](#))

571 Written evidence from Dr Julia Gillen ([MLI0003](#)), National Literacy Trust ([MLI0008](#)), Katy Potts ([MLI0010](#))

572 See paras 159–161.

573 See Appendix 5.

232. Our evidence suggested, however, that parents often lack the understanding and capacity to do this.⁵⁷⁴ Dr Mhairi Aitken, Senior Ethics Fellow at The Alan Turing Institute, told us that “children and young people’s experiences with these technologies can be very different from adult experiences”.⁵⁷⁵ Written evidence from a research group studying young people’s mental health and social media similarly found that “participants felt their families’ understanding of media literacy lagged their own and was based on their parents’ childhood experiences”.⁵⁷⁶ Youth Select Committee members told us that their parents had limited understanding of social media trends.⁵⁷⁷ Some stakeholders warned that parents can receive conflicting or sensationalist messaging about children’s online experiences, which can limit opportunities for open and nuanced conversations.⁵⁷⁸
233. Ms Shotbolt told us that overall, parents are “not getting very much media literacy information”.⁵⁷⁹ Researchers examining young people’s interaction with mental health information on social media similarly identified a lack of “a consistent conduit for supporting parents and carers”.⁵⁸⁰ As discussed in Chapter 5, libraries and other community settings for family workshops face similar resource and staff capacity constraints.⁵⁸¹ In July 2025, the Government announced the rollout of Best Start Family Hubs, as “a one stop shop for parents seeking a range of support”, including activities for children aged zero to five.⁵⁸²
234. Others, including members of the Youth Select Committee, suggested that trusted news publications have a role to play in providing media literacy education to parents.⁵⁸³ The BBC told us it is “very focused on helping parents navigate media”, and outlined plans to build further support for parents on media consumption and screentime into its existing educational brands.⁵⁸⁴
235. Laura Higgins, Senior Director of Community Safety and Civility at Roblox, acknowledged that “we can all do a lot more to help people, particularly parents and educators, understand what the platform is and how it works”.⁵⁸⁵ She outlined steps the platform has taken to engage with parents, including hiring a “global parent advocacy lead” and running workshops for Safer Internet Day, although these only reached “hundreds” of parents.⁵⁸⁶ TikTok, Meta and Google similarly highlighted their parent-focused initiatives, including on-platform parental controls and family pairing tools, as well as

574 [QQ 103, 109](#) (Vicki Shotbolt), [Q 110](#) (Matteo Bergamini), [Q 113](#) (Alistair Barfield); Written evidence from The Guardian Foundation ([MLI0043](#))

575 [Q 12](#)

576 Written evidence from Prof Ruth Page, Dr Alex Christiansen, Michael Larkin, Dr Shioma-Lei Craythorne, Prof Paul Crawford, Emma Garavini and Eva Asiedu-Addo ([MLI0015](#))

577 See Appendix 4.

578 Written evidence from Katy Potts ([MLI0010](#)), Manchester Institute for Education ([MLI0024](#))

579 [Q 105](#) (Vicki Shotbolt)

580 Written evidence from Prof Ruth Page, Dr Alex Christiansen, Michael Larkin, Dr Shioma-Lei Craythorne, Prof Paul Crawford, Emma Garavini and Eva Asiedu-Addo ([MLI0015](#))

581 See paras 170-173.

582 HM Government, ‘Government revives family services, supporting 500,000 more kids’ (July 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-revives-family-services-supporting-500000-more-kids> [accessed 9 July 2025]

583 [Q 66](#) (Hannah Perry); See Appendix 5.

584 [QQ 181, 198](#)

585 [Q 153](#)

586 [QQ 129, 130](#)

resources, workshops and campaigns aimed at educating parents.⁵⁸⁷ However, Ofcom-commissioned research found that these tools are not well signposted on many platforms, “which may make it difficult for parents to find and activate supervision tools”.⁵⁸⁸

236. Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety at DSIT, told us that the Government was “beginning to know what works” in terms of media literacy for parents, informed by Parent Zone’s DSIT-funded work.⁵⁸⁹
237. **Media literacy education should not be confined to school settings. Community groups and youth organisations have an important role to play, as do parents. Parents’ involvement is particularly important during the early years phase, as children are increasingly engaging with media and technology from a very young age.**
238. **We heard that parents want to help their children develop media literacy but lack sufficient skills themselves. Schools are a key means of delivering and signposting parental support in this area. Local social infrastructure, such as public libraries and youth services, is also vital and requires continued investment. These settings provide essential opportunities for young people and their families to develop media literacy skills in a more informal context.**
239. *In designing media literacy interventions for adults, including through public awareness campaigns and local initiatives, the Government should target outreach for parents through schools, libraries and family-focused community settings, such as the new Best Start family hubs. The Government should also explore opportunities to amplify and encourage use of existing resources, for example those provided by the BBC or third-sector organisations.*

587 QQ 128–29, 143, 144, 146; Written evidence from Meta (MLI0052)

588 Ofcom, *Behavioural Audit of Online Services* (June 2025), p 5: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/online-safety/research-statistics-and-data/online-services-research/a-behavioural-audit-of-online-services-in-the-uk_thematic-report.pdf [accessed 2 July 2025]

589 Q 271

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 2: The case for action

1. A failure to prioritise media literacy in the UK presents a threat not only to individual citizens, but to democracy itself. New technology has transformed our media and information environment in recent years, with social media algorithms having a profound impact. As this combines with the growing popularity of generative AI, change and complexity are likely to accelerate. Statistics from Ofcom and others make clear that UK citizens are poorly equipped to navigate today's increasingly crowded information environment. Urgent action from Government is needed. (Paragraph 24)

Chapter 3: Media literacy policy

2. The issues that the 2021–24 Online Media Literacy Strategy aimed to tackle persist: the media literacy sector continues to be held back by an approach that favours small-scale, short-term initiatives. The lack of a public impact assessment of the strategy has further limited opportunities for evaluation and improvement. (Paragraph 34)
3. *The Government should publish a detailed impact assessment of the 2021–24 Online Media Literacy Strategy. This should identify the lessons learned from its grant-funded pilots. The Government must articulate next steps arising from the strategy, including how successful initiatives should be scaled and funded for long-term impact.* (Paragraph 35)
4. The Government does not have a good track record of joined-up leadership on media literacy; we saw limited evidence of effective coordination across departments under the previous strategy. The reported lack of engagement from the Department for Education to date is a particular cause for concern. A new working group intended to coordinate media literacy efforts across government does not appear to have sufficient authority to drive effective cross-government cooperation and change in its current guise. (Paragraph 42)
5. *The Government must evaluate the effectiveness of the new working group, and develop it as necessary, including by changing the frequency of its meetings and the seniority of participants, to ensure it genuinely delivers a joined-up approach across government departments.* (Paragraph 43)
6. While some stakeholders find the concision and clarity of Ofcom's media literacy definition helpful, the Committee believes it fails to reflect the central importance of critical thinking and analysis to media literacy. (Paragraph 50)
7. *Ofcom should update its definition of media literacy to make more explicit reference to critical thinking.* (Paragraph 51)
8. Ofcom's research has been valuable in establishing and sharing 'what works' in media literacy. However, its focus on short-term funding for individual pilot programmes is unlikely to tackle long-standing issues in the media literacy sector. (Paragraph 52)
9. *In order to build on its existing evidence base, Ofcom must enable longer-term and larger-scale research projects, rather than multiple short-term pilots.* (Paragraph 53)

10. As the independent regulator, Ofcom is not the appropriate body to coordinate or deliver a nationwide media literacy programme. Only the Government can do this. To date, the Government has failed to fill this leadership vacuum. (Paragraph 64)
11. *The Government must provide a clearer overall direction for media literacy work across Whitehall and translate Ofcom's media literacy strategy into action. It must coordinate the work across education, public services and local government that is essential to deliver a comprehensive media literacy programme. This requires the nomination of a specific, senior minister to take responsibility for media literacy across government departments and to establish clearer lines of accountability on this issue to Parliament. (Paragraph 65)*
12. The Government's digital inclusion action plan is a positive example of a cross-departmental approach and provides a strong foundation on which to build. We welcome that it takes forward recommendations made in our 2023 report on tackling digital exclusion. However, media literacy should not be sidelined as a result of this shift in focus. The action plan makes limited reference to media literacy. Information provided to date about the Digital Inclusion Action Committee does not suggest that the topic will receive sufficient attention. (Paragraph 75)
13. *The Government must give much more explicit emphasis to media literacy in its action plan for digital inclusion, ensuring that it is recognised as a related, but discrete, area of work. The plan should serve as a catalyst for more joined-up work on media literacy, as well as digital inclusion. It should provide details of the "new initiatives" the Government will develop to enable people to build key media literacy skills. Evaluation of initiatives carried out under the digital inclusion action plan must include specific reporting on improvements in media literacy skills. The minister with responsibility for media literacy must be a member of the ministerial group on digital inclusion to ensure that specific focus on media literacy is sustained. (Paragraph 76)*
14. *The Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund should include significant long-term investment in discrete media literacy programmes. In delivering it, the Government should learn from the mistakes of the previous media literacy strategy and avoid contributing to further fragmentation and duplication across media literacy and digital inclusion initiatives. The Government should articulate clearly how this work integrates with Ofcom's programmes and builds on the regulator's research into best practice. (Paragraph 77)*

Chapter 4: Technology and media companies' contributions

15. We welcome Ofcom's efforts to encourage technology platforms and online services to promote media literacy. However, encouragement and voluntary commitments are insufficient in addressing the impact that these platforms have had on the wider media and information environment. (Paragraph 102)
16. We are not persuaded that Ofcom's media literacy by design principles have driven meaningful change to date. Platforms can say they are incorporating media literacy into their design with little scrutiny or accountability; at worst, this allows them to overstate their efforts in this area. (Paragraph 103)
17. *In its forthcoming statement of recommendations for platforms, Ofcom must set out minimum standards for media literacy by design. The statement should also give*

details of how platforms' performance in meeting these can be evaluated and how platforms will be held accountable. (Paragraph 104)

18. *In responding to this report, Ofcom must clarify how it will use its wider powers under the Online Safety Act 2023 to drive greater activity and accountability from platforms. This should include detail on how it will use its information gathering powers to investigate the efficacy of platforms' media literacy interventions, as well as its intentions to include media literacy in the transparency reporting or user empowerment requirements for services that are 'categorised' under the Act. (Paragraph 105)*
19. *We recommend that the Government establish stronger requirements on technology platforms to implement and evaluate media literacy interventions. Ofcom must be sufficiently empowered to take robust action to engage platforms in media literacy and hold them to account. (Paragraph 106)*
20. While some platforms have developed sustained partnerships with third-sector organisations, offering stable funding and brand visibility, platforms' priorities can shift quickly. We reject an approach to long-term funding that relies on the goodwill of technology companies. (Paragraph 112)
21. At a time of great financial challenges for both media organisations and government, we believe that the funding for large scale media literacy programmes should substantially come from the technology sector. The allocation of this funding would need to be managed by Ofcom or the Government to preserve the independence of initiatives and delivery partners. (Paragraph 113)
22. *The Government should develop mechanisms, including a levy on platforms, to secure long-term, stable funding from industry for independent media literacy initiatives. (Paragraph 114)*
23. Advances in technology amplify both the value of professional journalism, and the fragility of the industry's future. We reiterate the recommendation made in our report on the future of news that the Government should recognise more explicitly the value of a financially sustainable news sector. This represents the best way to maintain a shared understanding of facts. (Paragraph 129)
24. Local news supports media literacy within communities through relevant and trusted news provision. Grassroots initiatives supporting communities to produce their own local journalism are also valuable. We are concerned that, despite recognising the vital but vulnerable role of the local media sector, the Government has not yet taken steps to support it. (Paragraph 130)
25. *The Government must publish its local media strategy by the autumn of 2025. This should take into account the important role of local journalism in supporting media literacy. (Paragraph 131)*
26. Public service broadcasters make a significant contribution to media literacy through their provision of trusted and accurate news. The BBC's current work to support media literacy through its educational resources is useful, but we note that limited resource restricts its reach. We welcome the emphasis placed on the BBC's role in supporting media literacy in the recent speech by Tim Davie and will examine the BBC's future work in this area as part of our remit to scrutinise the broadcaster. (Paragraph 146)

Chapter 5: Media literacy for adults

27. Media literacy is a vital life skill, but engaging adults in media literacy training is challenging. The public has low awareness of media literacy and its relevance to their daily lives. Our evidence emphasised the importance of media literacy training being delivered through existing trusted relationships within local communities. Framing media literacy training as a way to help parents to support their children to navigate their online environment may also encourage take-up. (Paragraph 174)
28. The Government is right to identify the importance of supporting people's digital skills at their points of interaction with public services. Libraries and librarians are particularly well placed to provide media literacy education for adults as they already serve the information and literacy needs of local communities. We were pleased to see the Government highlight the role of public libraries in its digital inclusion action plan. (Paragraph 175)
29. We support efforts to strengthen the ability of local organisations and public services to provide media literacy training. We restate that this must be seen as complementary to, but distinct from, digital inclusion initiatives. We recognise, however, that frontline services and community groups are already stretched in assisting users with other, urgent matters and have limited capacity to take on additional responsibilities. (Paragraph 176)
30. *The Government's digital inclusion action plan should build media literacy competencies by enabling more consistent support—for example through leveraging platforms' funding—for initiatives delivered locally or through public services. The Government must ensure that in relying on trusted local stakeholders for delivery, it does not place further strain on frontline services and community groups without providing additional funding and support.* (Paragraph 177)
31. We welcome the Government's plan to increase understanding of media literacy among the general population through a public awareness campaign. However, a standalone campaign is unlikely to drive lasting behaviour change. This must be accompanied by sustained media literacy activity. (Paragraph 183)
32. *In designing its campaign, the Government should learn from international examples of best practice. Campaign messaging must be clear and direct audiences to additional resources and interventions providing more targeted, sustained support. The Government should adopt an annual Media Literacy Week as part of sustained, year-round activity on media literacy.* (Paragraph 184)

Chapter 6: Media literacy for children and young people

33. Engaging children and young people with media literacy during their time at school is a vital means of improving media literacy skills across the UK population. Unfortunately, witnesses painted a negative picture of the current levels of provision of media literacy education in English schools. (Paragraph 203)
34. The evidence we received overwhelmingly supported enhancing the coverage of media literacy in the national curriculum and ensuring it is integrated within a number of subjects. Witnesses also highlighted a need for media literacy education to be rooted in a core subject to ensure universal provision, and for it to be taught from the preschool phase onwards. (Paragraph 204)

35. As we identified in our recent report on the future of news, the Government's ongoing curriculum and assessment review provides an ideal opportunity to enhance coverage of media literacy within the national curriculum. We welcome statements from Government ministers, and the conclusions of the review's interim report, which suggest that media literacy will be a priority area of focus in the remaining phases of the review. (Paragraph 208)
36. *In addressing any related findings from the curriculum and assessment review, the Government must ensure that media literacy is embedded across the national curriculum in a way that guarantees consistent, repeated engagement with the topic for all pupils.* (Paragraph 209)
37. *It should also update the GCSE English Language curriculum to include media literacy skills development more explicitly and enable a wider range of media formats to be used as set texts.* (Paragraph 210)
38. *Finally, the Government should work with Ofsted to ensure that the delivery of cross-curricular media literacy teaching is included in the schools inspection framework.* (Paragraph 211)
39. At present, teachers lack the skills and confidence to deliver media literacy education in a way that is relevant to their students' experience of media. Relying on younger teachers' knowledge of social media and current trends is insufficient. (Paragraph 218)
40. *Initial teacher training and continuous professional development should be updated to incorporate media literacy, to ensure that teachers feel better equipped to deliver lessons on this topic. The design of a teacher training programme should be informed by previous pilot schemes and should leverage the expertise of subject associations and media literacy organisations.* (Paragraph 219)
41. *Greater efforts are needed to make teachers aware of the support that is available from a variety of media and voluntary organisations. The Department for Education should collaborate with media organisations, including the BBC, to develop age-appropriate resources to support the delivery of media literacy education in schools.* (Paragraph 220)
42. Media literacy education should not be confined to school settings. Community groups and youth organisations have an important role to play, as do parents. Parents' involvement is particularly important during the early years phase, as children are increasingly engaging with media and technology from a very young age. (Paragraph 237)
43. We heard that parents want to help their children develop media literacy but lack sufficient skills themselves. Schools are a key means of delivering and signposting parental support in this area. Local social infrastructure, such as public libraries and youth services, is also vital and requires continued investment. These settings provide essential opportunities for young people and their families to develop media literacy skills in a more informal context. (Paragraph 238)
44. *In designing media literacy interventions for adults, including through public awareness campaigns and local initiatives, the Government should target outreach for parents through schools, libraries and family-focused community settings, such as the new Best Start family hubs. The Government should also explore opportunities to amplify and encourage use of existing resources, for example those provided by the BBC or third-sector organisations.* (Paragraph 239)

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members

Viscount Colville of Culross
 Lord Dunlop
 Baroness Fleet
 Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill
 Lord Holmes of Richmond
 Baroness Keeley (Chair)
 Lord Knight of Weymouth
 The Lord Bishop of Leeds
 Lord McNally
 Lord Mitchell (until 7 July 2025)
 Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge
 Lord Storey
 Baroness Wheatcroft

Declarations of interest

Viscount Colville of Culross
Freelance TV producer
Development: STV (2022–)
Producer: BBC (1987–2016)

Lord Dunlop
No relevant interests declared

Baroness Fleet
Governor, Shoreditch Park Academy (2009–)
Former Editor, Evening Standard (2002–2009)
Former Independent Director, Times Newspapers Ltd (2011–2020)

Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill
No relevant interests declared

Lord Holmes of Richmond
No relevant interests declared

Baroness Keeley (Chair)
No relevant interests declared

Lord Knight of Weymouth
Chair of the Board of Trustees, E-Act Multi-Academy Trust
Director, Suklaa Limited
Chair, Board of Directors, Council of British International Schools
Pro bono adviser to a not-for-profit media literacy education start-up

The Lord Bishop of Leeds
No relevant interests declared

Lord McNally
No relevant interests declared

Lord Mitchell
No relevant interests declared

Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge
Guest of Google Future Forum, Oxfordshire, 5–6 December 2024; transport, accommodation and subsistence costs met by Google

Lord Storey
No relevant interests declared

Baroness Wheatcroft

Chair, Appointments and Complaints Committee, Financial Times

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests:
<http://www.parliament.uk/hlregister>.

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WITNESSES

Evidence is published online at <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/170/communications-and-digital-committee/publications/> and available for inspection at the Parliamentary Archives (020 7219 3074).

Evidence received by the Committee is listed below in chronological order of oral evidence session and in alphabetical order. Those witnesses marked with ** gave both oral evidence and written evidence. Those marked with * gave oral evidence and did not submit any written evidence. All other witnesses submitted written evidence only.

Oral evidence in chronological order

- | | | |
|----|---|-----------------------------------|
| * | Professor Sander van der Linden, Professor of Social Psychology in Society, University of Cambridge | <u>QQ 1–16</u> |
| * | Dr Mhairi Aitken, Senior Ethics Fellow, Public Policy Programme, The Alan Turing Institute | |
| * | Leo Pekkala, Deputy Director, National Audiovisual Institute of Finland (KAVI) and Head of Media Education and Audiovisual Media Department | <u>QQ 17–33</u> |
| * | Andy Demeulenaere, General Coordinator, Mediawijs | |
| * | Matthew Johnson, Director of Education, MediaSmarts | <u>QQ 34–51</u> |
| * | Martina Chapman, National Coordinator, Media Literacy Ireland | |
| * | Will Gardner OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Childnet | <u>QQ 52–67</u> |
| ** | Chris Morris, Chief Executive Officer, Full Fact | |
| * | Hannah Perry, Associate Director, Information Ecosystems, Demos | |
| ** | Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Assistant Professor in Digital Media and Communications, University of Birmingham | <u>QQ 68–85</u> |
| ** | Dr Emma Stone, Director of Evidence and Engagement, Good Things Foundation | |
| ** | Marc Davies, Digital Programme Lead, Cwmpas | |
| ** | Carolyn Bunting MBE, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Internet Matters | <u>QQ 86–100</u> |
| * | Jonathan Baggaley, Chief Executive Officer, PSHE Association | |
| ** | Claire Pollard, Executive Board Member, Media Education Association | |
| * | Alistair Barfield, Founder and Director, Deflect + Protect | <u>QQ 101–126</u> |
| ** | Matteo Bergamini MBE, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Shout Out UK | |
| ** | Vicki Shotbolt, Chief Executive Officer, Parent Zone | |

- ★ Zoe Darmé, Director of Trust Strategy, Google Search [QQ 127–162](#)
- ★ Ben Bradley, Senior Government Relations and Public Policy Manager, TikTok
- ★ Laura Higgins, Senior Director of Community Safety and Civility, Roblox
- ★★ Frances Yeoman, Head of Journalism, Liverpool John Moores University [QQ 163–177](#)
- ★★ Elli Narewska, Head of News and Media Literacy, The Guardian Foundation
- ★ Jonathan Heawood, Executive Director, Public Interest News Foundation
- ★★ Cerys Griffiths, Creative Director, BBC Education; Patricia Hidalgo, Director of Children’s and Education; and Lindsay McCoy, Executive News Editor, BBC Verify, BBC [QQ 178–209](#)
- ★★ Kate Davies, Public Policy Director; and Ed Leighton, Group Director, Strategy and Research (interim), Ofcom [QQ 210–247](#)
- ★★ Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety; and Chloe Templeton, Deputy Director for Information Resilience and Public Safety, HM Government—Department for Science, Innovation and Technology [QQ 248–289](#)
- ★★ Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister of State for School Standards; and Matthew Hopkinson, Deputy Director, Life Skills Division, HM Government—Department for Education

Alphabetical list of all witnesses

- Advertising Association (joint submission) [MLI0023](#)
- Eva Asiedu-Addo, Peer Researcher and Public Involvement Officer, The McPin Foundation (joint submission) [MLI0015](#)
- Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) [MLI0030](#)
- ★ Dr Mhairi Aitken ([QQ 1–16](#))
- ★ Alistair Barfield ([QQ 101–126](#))
- ★★ BBC ([QQ 178–209](#)) [MLI0053](#)
- [MLI0057](#)
- Professor Robert Beveridge [MLI0007](#)
- Dr Louise Black, Research Fellow, University of Manchester (joint submission) [MLI0024](#)
- Dr Ali Body, Head of Impact, Insights and Research, Global Action Plan (joint submission) [MLI0020](#)
- Dr Sophie Booton, Researcher, University of Oxford [MLI0029](#)

	Professor David Buckingham, Emeritus Professor, Institute of Education, University College London and Honorary Professor, Loughborough University	<u>MLI0001</u>
	Dr Elinor Carmi, Senior Lecturer in Data Politics and Social Justice, City St. George's, University of London	<u>MLI0026</u>
★	Childnet (<u>QQ 52–67</u>)	
	Dr Alex Christiansen, Research Fellow, University of Birmingham (joint submission)	<u>MLI0015</u>
	Common Sense Media	<u>MLI0011</u>
	ConnectFutures	<u>MLI0016</u>
	Professor Paul Crawford, Professor of Health Humanities, University of Nottingham (joint submission)	<u>MLI0015</u>
	Dr Shioma-Lei Craythorne, Research Fellow, Aston University (joint submission)	<u>MLI0015</u>
★★	Cwmpas (<u>QQ 68–85</u>)	<u>MLI0042</u>
	Jade Davies, Postgraduate Researcher, University of Manchester (joint submission)	<u>MLI0024</u>
	Decentered Media	<u>MLI0048</u>
	Dr Ola Demkowicz, Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Education, University of Manchester (joint submission)	<u>MLI0024</u>
★	Demos (<u>QQ 52–67</u>)	
	Financial Times	<u>MLI0051</u>
	Professor Julie Firmstone, Professor of Journalism and Political Communication, University of Leeds (joint submission)	<u>MLI0019</u>
	First News	<u>MLI0018</u>
★★	Full Fact (<u>QQ 52–67</u>)	<u>MLI0047</u>
	Emma Garavini, Senior Youth Involvement Officer, The McPin Foundation (joint submission)	<u>MLI0015</u>
	Professor Julia Gillen, Professor of Literacy Studies, Lancaster University	<u>MLI0003</u>
★★	Good Things Foundation (<u>QQ 68–85</u>)	<u>MLI0046</u>
★	Google Search (<u>QQ 127–162</u>)	
★★	The Guardian Foundation (<u>QQ 163–177</u>)	<u>MLI0043</u>
	Oliver Hayes, Head of Policy and Campaigns, Global Action Plan (joint submission)	<u>MLI0020</u>
	Dr Jo Hickmann Dunn, Research Fellow in Social Media and Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing, University of Manchester (joint submission)	<u>MLI0024</u>
★★	HM Government—Department for Education (<u>QQ 248–289</u>)	

- ★★ HM Government—Department for Science, Innovation and Technology ([QQ 248–289](#)) [MLI0049](#)
- IMPRESS [MLI0006](#)
- ★★ Internet Matters ([QQ 86–100](#)) [MLI0039](#)
- Into Film [MLI0041](#)
- Katy Potts, Computing and Online Safety Children’s Services, Islington Council, London Borough of Islington [MLI0010](#)
- Dr Richard Jones, Director of Journalism, Politics and Contemporary History, University of Salford [MLI0004](#)
- Professor Michael Larkin, Professor of Psychology, Aston University (joint submission) [MLI0015](#)
- Libraries Connected [MLI0054](#)
- Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science [MLI0040](#)
- Media and Information Literacy Alliance [MLI0033](#)
- ★★ Media Education Association ([QQ 86–100](#)) [MLI0038](#)
- ★ Media Literacy Ireland ([QQ 34–51](#))
- Media Smart (joint submission) [MLI0023](#)
- ★ MediaSmarts ([QQ 34–51](#))
- ★ Mediawijs ([QQ 17–33](#))
- Meta [MLI0052](#)
- Mhor Collective [MLI0002](#)
- Dr Karen Middleton, Senior Lecturer in Marketing, University of Portsmouth (joint submission) [MLI0020](#)
- ★ National Audiovisual Institute of Finland (KAVI) ([QQ 17–33](#))
- National Education Union [MLI0055](#)
- National Literacy Trust [MLI0008](#)
- Dr François Nel, Reader in Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship, University of Central Lancashire and Founder, News Futures FORUM [MLI0005](#)
- ★★ Ofcom ([QQ 210–247](#)) [MLI0050](#)
- [MLI0056](#)
- Professor Ruth Page, Professor of Applied Linguistics, University of Birmingham (joint submission) [MLI0015](#)
- Dr Margarita Panayiotou, Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Education, University of Manchester (joint submission) [MLI0024](#)
- ★★ Parent Zone ([QQ 101–126](#)) [MLI0014](#)
- Sarah Pavey, Education Consultant and Trainer, SP4IL; and PhD student, Napier University [MLI0021](#)

**	Dr Gianfranco Polizzi (QQ 68–85)	MLI0045
*	PSHE Association (QQ 86–100)	
*	Public Interest News Foundation (QQ 163–177)	
	Dr Helen Ringrow, Associate Professor in Contemporary Discourse, University of Portsmouth (joint submission)	MLI0020
*	Roblox (QQ 127–162)	
	Royal Statistical Society	MLI0032
	Salford Business School, University of Salford	MLI0027
	Professor Genia Schönbaumsfeld, Professor of Philosophy, University of Southampton	MLI0009
	Sense about Science	MLI0025
**	Shout Out UK (QQ 101–126)	MLI0031
	Tecola Smith	MLI0036
	Professor John Steel, Research Professor in Journalism, University of Derby (joint submission)	MLI0019
	Dr Ana Cristina Suzina, Lecturer, Loughborough University London	MLI0022
*	TikTok (QQ 127–162)	
	UK Interactive Entertainment (Ukie)	MLI0035
*	Professor Sander van der Linden (QQ 1–16)	
	Voice of the Listener & Viewer	MLI0028
	Digital Resilience in Education Team, Welsh Government	MLI0037
	School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster	MLI0012
	Wikimedia UK	MLI0017
	WISE KIDS	MLI0044
	Workers Educational Association (WEA)	MLI0034
**	Frances Yeoman (QQ 163–177)	MLI0013

APPENDIX 3: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Background

Media literacy, as defined by Ofcom, is “the ability to use, understand and create media and communications across multiple formats and services”.⁵⁹⁰ According to the regulator’s strategy, “advancing media literacy to support people to navigate content safely, and to flourish online, is increasingly essential to our daily lives.”⁵⁹¹

Analysis suggests, however, that the UK is falling behind in this critical area. The country ranked 13th in the Open Society Institute’s Media Literacy Index: 2023,⁵⁹² dropping from 11th in 2022⁵⁹³ and 10th in 2021.⁵⁹⁴ Only 45% of UK adults are confident they can judge whether sources of information are truthful, and only 30% feel confident judging whether content is AI generated.⁵⁹⁵

Meanwhile, young children are increasingly present online, with a third of those aged five to seven accessing social media unsupervised.⁵⁹⁶ Recent research highlights the threats of online conspiracy theories and misogyny in schools.⁵⁹⁷ Yet media literacy teaching has been described as a “postcode lottery”, as a result of piecemeal curriculum guidance. Some 90% of teachers want to see media literacy explicitly incorporated into the national curriculum.⁵⁹⁸

Wider media literacy initiatives face long-standing challenges including short-term and small-scale funding that leads to fragmentation and duplication; limited coordination among stakeholders; and a lack of clear benchmarks for evaluating success.⁵⁹⁹

Inquiry aims

Our inquiry will seek to establish a clear vision for what good media literacy should look like in the UK, and examine the barriers to achieving this vision. The inquiry will clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Government, industry and regulators in advancing media literacy, and assess the extent to which each sector is currently fulfilling its duties. It will identify and prioritise the key actions

590 Ofcom, *A Positive Vision for Media Literacy*, *Ofcom’s Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy* (7 October 2024): <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/making-sense-of-media/media-literacy/ofcoms-three-year-media-literacy-strategy-final.pdf?v=382044> [accessed 16 June 2025]

591 *Ibid.*

592 Open Society Institute Sofia, *The Media Literacy Index* (2023): <https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MLI-report-in-English-22.06.pdf> [accessed 16 June 2025]

593 *Ibid.*

594 Open Society Institute Sofia, *The Media Literacy Index 2021, Double Trouble: Resilience to Fake News at the Time of Covid-19 Infodemic*, Policy Brief 56 (March 2021): https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MediaLiteracyIndex2021_ENG.pdf [accessed 16 June 2025]

595 Ofcom, ‘Four in 10 UK adults encounter misinformation’: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/attitudes-to-news/four-in-10-uk-adults-encounter-misinformation/> [accessed 16 June 2025]

596 Ofcom, ‘A window into young children’s online worlds’: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/a-window-into-young-childrens-online-worlds/> [accessed 16 June 2025]

597 Public First, *Commission into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools* (February 2025): <https://counteringconspiracies.publicfirst.co.uk/> [accessed 16 June 2025]; PLOS One, *Understanding the influence of online misogyny in schools from the perspective of teachers* (February 2025): <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0299339> [accessed 16 June 2025]

598 Internet Matters, *A Vision for Media Literacy* (2024): <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/research/media-literacy-report-2024/> [accessed 16 June 2025]

599 PLOS one, *Understanding the influence of online misogyny in schools from the perspective of teachers* (August 2023): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651167fabf7c1a0011bb4660/cross-sectoral-challenges_to_media_literacy.pdf [accessed 16 June 2025]

required to enhance media literacy skills across the population, to enable citizens to engage with the digital world safely and responsibly.

Key questions

1. What are the overall aims of delivering media literacy in the UK?
 - (a) How would you define media literacy? What would ‘good’ media literacy look like?
 - (b) What are the risks and consequences of not achieving these aims?
 - (c) What indicators or evidence would demonstrate improvement?
2. How well are existing UK media literacy initiatives working, and how could they be enhanced?
 - (a) How are responsibilities currently split between different stakeholders, such as the Government, industry, and civil society, and could improvements be made to these arrangements?
 - (b) Which other actors (including online platforms) have a role to play in improving media literacy in the UK?
 - (c) Are there examples of good practice on a local or regional level that could be scaled more widely across the UK?
3. How will media literacy need to evolve over the next five years to keep up with changes in the media landscape and technological advancements?
4. How does the UK’s approach to media literacy compare with that of other countries? What international best practice could be adopted or adapted here?
5. How adequately is the UK’s regulatory and legislative framework delivering media literacy?
 - (a) What is your assessment of Ofcom’s media literacy strategy?
 - (b) What further action is needed from the Government, if any?
 - (c) Are changes needed to legislation, for example the Online Safety Act 2023 or the Media Act 2024?
6. What is the role of formal education in relation to media literacy?
 - (a) How effectively is media literacy being taught in schools at present? How can critical thinking best be taught?
 - (b) What interventions are needed to support the delivery of media literacy education in schools, for example changes to the national curriculum and to teacher training?
 - (c) How should approaches to media literacy education vary according to age group?
 - (d) What are the opportunities to engage children and young people in media literacy programmes outside formal education?
7. What are the barriers and challenges to teaching media literacy to adults?
 - (a) How could these be overcome?

You may follow the progress of the inquiry at <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/9030/media-literacy/>.

APPENDIX 4: ROUNDTABLE WITH YOUTH SELECT COMMITTEE

On 8 May 2025, the Committee met with ten members of the Youth Select Committee (YSC). In attendance were Baroness Keeley (Chair), Viscount Colville of Culross, Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill, Lord Holmes of Richmond, Lord Knight of Weymouth, Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge, and Lord Storey.

The purpose of the meeting was to understand young people's perspectives on media literacy. The YSC's members are aged 14 to 18 and represent regions across England, as well as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Two roundtable discussions were held, exploring YSC members' understanding of media literacy, their experience of media literacy education in school, and findings from their recent report on social media and youth violence, which included recommendations about improving media literacy education in the UK.

Media literacy in general

When asked about their understanding of media literacy, YSC members described principles and competencies including being able to identify reliable information, cross-checking sources, seeking balanced perspectives, recognising echo chambers and understanding that platform algorithms determine what content users see.

The members recognised that their own media literacy skills were likely to exceed those of their peers due to their previous experience researching online harm and social media issues through their YSC work. However, they acknowledged a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, admitting to inconsistent use of media literate practices when consuming online news in their daily routines. They suggested that young people more broadly lack awareness of source credibility and struggle to recognise bias in online content.

YSC members told us that based on their experience, young people are unfamiliar with the term 'media literacy' or fail to understand its significance. They emphasised the need to establish a clear definition and build a baseline awareness of the topic across society. The members stressed that media literacy skills should be built up gradually to avoid causing confusion or fear and argued that since mobile phones and social media are embedded in daily life, media literacy should be equally embedded.

They identified three core principles for making progress in this area: transparency from both social media platforms and the Government; clear responsibilities for tech platforms to support media literacy, along with clear accountability; and providing schools and parents with the necessary resources to support meaningful conversations. They emphasised that effective media literacy requires people to understand why they see specific information and how algorithms drive content, viewing this understanding as essential for both safety and civic engagement.

Social media platforms

YSC members identified a fundamental conflict between social media platforms' attention-based business models and their potential role in promoting media literacy, with one member comparing it to telling a criminal to convict themselves. They emphasised that platforms need to understand their duty of care to their audiences and move beyond treating young users merely as revenue sources. Members proposed several solutions including public rating systems to evaluate platforms' efforts in tackling disinformation, stronger regulatory accountability, and greater algorithmic transparency.

Members noted that existing platform wellbeing and safety features, such as age verification and screen-time limits, were easy for users to override. In addition, platform design features make it easier to like or share content than to report it. They highlighted specific concerns about platform moderation, noting poor oversight on platforms like Discord, where harmful links are frequently shared. They called for features such as integrated fact-checking systems and emphasised the need for more regulation specifically targeting online influencers.

News consumption

YSC members highlighted challenges in navigating the current news landscape, particularly the difficulty of identifying and distinguishing between AI-generated content, opinion pieces and factual reporting. Social media platforms were described as the primary mechanism younger audiences use to follow the news. YSC members explained that in their experience, young people typically encounter news stories on social media first, then visit trusted sources such as the BBC to seek verification and additional information. They noted that while young people no longer watch traditional television news, they do engage with trusted sources through digital platforms, citing the BBC's TikTok content and BBC Verify as examples of how established news organisations successfully reach younger audiences. Despite the complexities of the digital news environment, members emphasised that the BBC remains their first point of reference when seeking reliable information about important events. YSC members said their parents relied on traditional outlets for news as well as for information about social media trends and the risks associated with young people being online.

Media literacy in formal education

YSC members acknowledged the challenging position schools face in addressing media literacy, given rapid technological change. At the same time, they criticised the existing approach to media literacy education, which they saw as reactive and inconsistent. They noted that schools tend to respond slowly to online issues, often adopting punitive measures that leave students feeling 'told off', rather than better equipped. They suggested that current provision varies significantly across schools, with existing efforts focusing heavily on basic online safety, rather than comprehensive media literacy skills.

Members expressed frustration with what they felt were superficial approaches, citing examples of schools dedicating just one annual assembly to online safety, and teachers who lack personal social media experience struggling to relate to students' digital experiences. They emphasised that simply telling students that social media is bad or evil, without teaching evaluation skills or explaining how platforms curate content, is inadequate for developing genuine media literacy.

Members advocated for a transformation from knowledge-based teaching to experiential learning that incorporates real-life examples and materials. They proposed innovative approaches such as allowing students to analyse their own social media feeds in class to understand content sources and algorithmic curation, rather than relying on hypothetical scenarios that feel irrelevant. Participants stressed that media literacy should be integrated across the curriculum rather than confined to standalone lessons, highlighting a successful example from an economics class, where students examined how multiple news sources had covered relevant topics.

They recommended that media literacy education should begin in primary school, given that children receive mobile phones at increasingly younger ages. Members

also called for better teacher training on social media platforms and their impacts, and the involvement of young people in curriculum development.

Media literacy outside schools

We heard from YSC members that media literacy learning should extend beyond school settings. They identified two key sources of informal media literacy education: parental guidance and community-based youth services that provide safe spaces for digital learning and discussion.

While parents were viewed as crucial partners in media literacy education. YSC members identified challenges in parent-child communication around digital issues. They emphasised that parents frequently lack understanding of online platforms, their features and potential harms, and that they may need to develop their own media literacy skills in order to provide guidance. They noted generational differences in social media experiences, with parents often using different platforms and having limited awareness of current trends that affect young people.

Members proposed creating accessible resources including centralised portals for parental education, introducing workplace-based media literacy training, and leveraging trusted news outlets like the BBC to reach parents.

Youth services were described as the central key to solving so many things. YSC members emphasised that they provide essential spaces for young people to connect in person, build confidence, share opinions, and engage with trusted adults during periods when they might otherwise turn to social media for entertainment. Participants highlighted how youth services are well placed to deliver media literacy education as they offer environments where young people feel safe and comfortable, contrasting this with formal educational settings. They noted the success of community and faith leaders in addressing misinformation, referencing groups formed after the 2024 Southport riots that effectively countered fake news and conspiracy theories spreading online.

However, members expressed concern about chronic underfunding of youth services, noting they have faced budget cuts despite their vital role in providing alternatives to screen time and social media dependency. They argued that enhanced funding and government endorsement of youth services, including organisations like the Scouts, would create sustainable frameworks for developing media literacy skills while simultaneously addressing broader community needs and building the informed citizenry necessary for future democratic participation.

APPENDIX 5: COMMITTEE VISIT TO ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

On 17 June 2025, the Committee visited St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Islington, London. In attendance were Baroness Keeley (Chair), Lord Dunlop, Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill, Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge and Baroness Wheatcroft.

The purpose of the visit was to see an example of how schools can support children to develop their media literacy, online safety and digital skills, as well as developing the Committee's understanding of the experiences of teachers and parents in relation to these areas. The visit was hosted jointly by St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Common Sense Media and Islington Council.

During the visit, the Committee observed lessons with Reception, Year 3 and Year 6 classes that made use of Common Sense Media's digital citizenship curriculum resources.⁶⁰⁰ We also held a roundtable discussion with parents of pupils who attend the school. Finally, we held small group discussions with teachers and senior leaders from St Joseph's and St Aloysius' College, a secondary school also located in Islington.

The parents we spoke to discussed the potential risks of children having access to devices and online services, and the strategies they have in place to manage these. When asked about the importance of 'media literacy' specifically, participants appeared to have limited awareness of the term. However, they noted the trust children often place in the information they see online, as well as how easy it is for children to encounter extreme views.

The parents also provided positive examples of how access to devices and platforms had supported their children's creativity and learning. The parents suggested it was necessary for children to have access to devices and services so that they can develop the skills they will need for the future and learn how to navigate the online environment safely. They valued the emphasis placed on digital skills development and online safety at their children's school. Some mentioned in particular the school's 'digital leaders' programme, which supports a group of pupils to deliver peer learning to others.

With teachers, we discussed where media literacy should sit in the curriculum and how teachers can be supported to deliver media literacy education effectively. The participants emphasised the need for digital literacy teaching to begin at an early age and stressed that the curriculum needs to keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies. Teachers noted the value of Safer Internet Day in providing opportunity for cross-curricular activities focused on online safety. They also underlined the importance of effective training, to ensure that teachers in all subjects can respond to media literacy or online safety-related discussions that might arise in the classroom. Finally, teachers identified a need to build parents' awareness of the potential issues that children may encounter when accessing content online, and for media literacy education to be reinforced at home. They noted that it can be difficult to engage parents with these issues through events organised by the school and felt that public awareness campaigns could be beneficial.

⁶⁰⁰ The Common Sense Media Digital Citizenship Curriculum is a free resource of 72 lessons for students aged five to 18. Resources are mapped by topic, year and term, and are aligned to relevant UK educational policy. See Common Sense Education, 'Digital Citizenship Lessons for the UK': <https://www.common sense.org/education/uk/digital-citizenship> [accessed 30 June 2025]