HOUSE OF LORDS COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY: ENSURING THE FUTURE: STRATEGIES FOR SECURING NEWS LITERACY EDUCATION IN THE UK

This policy brief addresses the advancement of news literacy education across the United Kingdom. It originates from the News Futures 2035 initiative, a participatory process with over 300 stakeholders engaging over 18 months, supported by the Google News Initiative and Research UK.

Dr. François Nel, a Reader in Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Dr. Kamila Rymajdo, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Central Lancashire, are leading the project.

A key event of this initiative was the News Literacy Education Working Group meeting held on May 1-2, 2024, in collaboration with Professor Simeon Yates and Dr. Gianfranco Polizzi from the University of Liverpool and Frances Yeoman from Liverpool John Moores University.

The full list of participants is below.

Introduction

This brief draws on insights from a workshop of 15 experts representing industry, policy and regulation, education, civil society and academia. The goal of the News Literacy Education Working Group was to answer the question: “How can the provision of news literacy education in the UK be secured over the next decade?”

Their collective expertise underscored the urgent need for comprehensive and inclusive strategies to enhance the public's ability to engage with news media critically. The group also highlighted the consequences of inaction, emphasising the risks and societal impacts of neglecting news literacy education. They underlined the urgent necessity for proactive measures to encourage active engagement and ensure a well-informed citizenry.

The experts agree that this requires harnessing the existing expertise of teachers (for example, Media, English, and Citizenship), librarians, and information professionals in collaboration with journalists who are already working in this space and civil society.

They also recommend joining up the existing work in media and information literacy coordinated by the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and Ofcom, in consultation with other relevant media literacy practitioners and organisations, including the Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA), as well as connect with wider multi-stakeholder processes such as the proposed News Futures Forum.[1]

Recommendations for Enhancing News Literacy Education in the UK

1. **Mandate the provision of news literacy for every student in every school and college across the nations of the United Kingdom:** While the working group notes the vital work of effective but small-scale news literacy initiatives across the UK, the only way to ensure news literacy education for all is for the DfE to implement it comprehensively within a media

[1] Further information about the News Futures Forum can be found in the News Futures 2035 Final Report available to read here: https://mediainnovationstudio.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/NF2035-Final-Report.pdf.

and information literacy educational framework, from primary through to higher education. As a result of this, it should be reflected in the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) within the key judgement area of students' personal development. This will ensure foundational knowledge and critical thinking skills are developed early and reinforced continuously.

2. **Expand lifelong learning and broaden educational participation:** Ensure that news literacy education encompasses not only formal education sectors but also promotes lifelong learning, involving diverse actors beyond traditional educational institutions, including from industry, policy, civil society and academia. To that end, as part of media and information literacy, news literacy should be included as an element of all digital inclusion programmes and interventions designed to promote not just digital access, but also digital skills. This will ensure that any citizen who is helped to expand their online activity through such programmes will have the knowledge and critical thinking skills to keep themselves safe and well informed, as well as the functional skills required to use digital technologies practically. Digital inclusion without MIL risks leaving people vulnerable, so more must be done to ensure that the two are delivered in synergy.

3. **Coordinate news literacy initiatives and funding through a News Literacy Forum and Minister for Media and Information Literacy:** Establish an ongoing multi-stakeholder Forum to coordinate and support news literacy initiatives within the national curricula and those operating outside it. This Forum would also serve as a process for structured engagements among all stakeholders, bringing together educators, media professionals, policymakers, and tech companies to collaboratively address the challenges and opportunities in news literacy education. The working group also recommends that a Minister for Media and Information Literacy role be created, with news literacy being an explicit part of their brief. This role would be tasked with coordinating activities (1) and (2), overseeing potential overlapping literacies, and driving responsibility and accountability across regulation, education, industry, and civil society.

News Literacy Education Working Group Participants

Madhav Chinnappa, Senior Executive Consultant, formerly with Google
Maeve Connolly, Deputy Digital Editor, The Irish News
Alison Gow, Editorial Consultant and Fellow of the Society of Editors
David Lush, Senior Advisor for Organisational Learning, International Media Support
Professor Julian McDougall, Professor of Media and Education, Bournemouth University and Chair of the Media and Information Literacy Alliance (UK chapter of the Unesco MIL Alliance)
Emma Meese, Director, Independent Community News Network
Elli Narewska, Head of Primary Education, The Guardian Foundation
Dr François Nel, Reader/Associate Professor of Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship, University of Central Lancashire
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