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Media literacy provision from the perspective of policymakers and civil society organisations in five areas of the UK: a case study approach

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ABSTRACT

Despite efforts to promote media literacy provision (i.e., the support provided to develop people's media literacy within and outside formal education) in the UK, this provision remains fragmented, under-supported, and under-evaluated. Employing a case study methodology, this article explores the state of media literacy policy and provision within five areas of the UK: Birmingham and the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Scotland, and Wales. Based on semi-structured interviews with policymakers and representatives of civil society organisations, key findings suggest that government bodies within all five areas have established digital inclusion networks, with media literacy provision piggybacking on these networks. While best practice is often based on forms of collaboration (e.g., to access target populations, co-design/co-deliver initiatives), significant barriers remain, including funding and the lack of an overarching framework for coordinating media literacy provision across the UK. The implications of these findings for research, policy, and practice are discussed.

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Introduction

As our societies become increasingly digitally mediated, it is essential that both children and adults have the skills and knowledge to navigate the opportunities and risks presented by digital technologies, such as the internet, digital devices, and artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies are useful for interacting with others, learning, and searching for jobs and information, among other benefits. However, they also present considerable risks – e.g., in the form of misinformation, scams, and online abuse (OECD 2019). This is why promoting media literacy has never been so important. Ofcom (2024a) defines media literacy as ‘the ability to use, understand and create media and communications across multiple formats and services’ (3). Approached as an umbrella term, media literacy overlaps with different types of literacy, including information, news, digital, and data literacies. This article focuses on the use of digital technologies. As such, media literacy is here understood as incorporating not just functional digital skills and knowledge but also, as

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captured by the concept of critical digital literacy, the ability to critically evaluate online content and the broader digital environment (Polizzi 2023). This includes an understanding of how internet corporations operate along with the potentials and limitations of digital technologies.

Many individuals and groups in the UK lack fundamental media literacy skills. We know from Ofcom (2025b) that three in ten children do not know how to spot a fake social media profile, only fewer than 40% are able to identify advertising on search engines, and more than 50% trust AI-generated news articles as much as or even more than those produced by humans. Similarly, more than 50% of adults do not know how to distinguish real from fake social media posts, and almost five in ten do not know how to identify advertising in search engine results (Ofcom 2025a). What is more, only 34% are aware of how companies collect information about them based on what they do online, with many lacking the confidence to manage their personal data (Ofcom 2025a; Yates et al. 2021). It is clear, therefore, that there is an urgent need for media literacy among large portions of the UK population.

Media literacy provision can be broadly understood as the support delivered to different groups to develop their media literacy through formal education (e.g., schools, universities), non-formal learning (e.g., programmes delivered by libraries and charities), and/or informal learning (e.g., self-directed learning, interactions with friends and family) (Johnson and Majewska 2022). Promisingly, children can be more easily reached through formal education. However, media literacy education is not mandatory and remains patchy across the country. On the one hand, it is integrated in the national curricula of nations like Wales and Scotland but with practical challenges in terms of effective and consistent delivery (Martzoukou et al. 2023; Williams 2023). On the other hand, it is not firmly embedded in the national curriculum for England and remains at the discretion of schools (Cannon, Connolly, and Parry 2022; Polizzi 2020).

Promisingly, an independent review of this curriculum, commissioned by the UK Government (2024), was recently undertaken, with recommendations suggesting that media literacy education should be taught across different subjects, including primarily through strengthened English and Citizenship curricula (Curriculum and Assessment Review Panel 2025). The UK Government (2025) is determined to act on these recommendations, although their implementation and outcomes remain to be seen and evaluated. Meanwhile, it remains difficult to reach most adults through formal education, since they are no longer in school or university. As a result, current media literacy provision in the UK relies heavily on the work of civil society organisations (e.g., charities, community groups) targeting different populations, including both adults and children. This reliance is reflected in the UK Government's Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS 2021b), which prioritises the role of these organisations in delivering targeted media literacy provision, rather than placing primary responsibility on DfE to embed robust media literacy education from an early age. However, as found by previous work in this area, this type of provision remains highly fragmented, under-supported, and under-evaluated (Edwards et al. 2023). Furthermore, these issues are compounded by UK Government policy, with documents like the Online Safety Act (UK Government 2023) and the Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS 2021b) privileging a narrow and protectionist approach to media literacy, framed primarily in the context of internet safety, and a positivist understanding of what counts as robust evaluation (Bicket et al. 2021; Gibson and Connolly 2023; Thompson 2025).

Given the fragmentation of the UK media literacy sector, to better support provision and understand what works (or does not), it is therefore essential to gain a deeper understanding of different localities across the country. Most media literacy research in the UK has focused on those providing direct support (e.g., educators, parents/carers, librarians) or receiving it (e.g., students, people learning from peers) (e.g., Parry, Howard, and Penfold 2020; Scott 2022). This article focuses on the broader role of two under-researched stakeholders – policymakers and civil society organisations – in providing media literacy opportunities within five UK areas: Birmingham and the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Scotland, and Wales. Using a qualitative case study methodology, we explore the state of policy and provision within each media literacy ecosystem, with each area serving as a case study because of its differences and specificities. In doing so, we examine key features of each ecosystem along with examples of best practice and challenges. Based

on semi-structured interviews with policymakers and organisation representatives, we found that all five areas, despite varying degrees of policy development and levels of activity, have established digital inclusion networks, with media literacy provision piggybacking on these networks. Despite many examples of best practice relying on forms of collaboration (e.g., to access target groups, co-design/co-deliver initiatives), significant barriers remain, including funding and the lack of an overarching framework for coordinating media literacy provision across the UK.

In the sections that follow, we first review relevant literature, focusing on media literacy policy and practice at UK level. Then, after presenting the methods used for this study, we present each case study, focusing on best practice and challenges within each area. Finally, we discuss commonalities and differences across the case studies, along with this study's limitations and implications for research, policy, and practice.

The current state of media literacy provision in the UK

Amid concerns around misinformation and other online harms such as online abuse and financial scams, the UK's draft Online Safety Bill was published by the Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS 2021a) to establish a new framework for regulating and tackling harmful online content. In 2023, the Bill was signed off by the Houses of Parliament and has now become the Online Safety Act (UK Government 2023). This piece of legislation has several objectives, including: (1) placing new duty of care responsibilities on social media companies; and (2) extending Ofcom's obligations and powers, previously outlined in the Communications Act 2003 (UK Government 2003), to promote media literacy among the public. As part of this objective, DCMS (2021b) published the Online Media Literacy Strategy, which is now under the remit of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). This strategy outlines key challenges to media literacy provision in the UK, including: (1) the lack of rigorous evaluations of initiatives (e.g., educational resources, events, training, education programmes); (2) the lack of long-term funding for civil society organisations delivering such initiatives; (3) the challenge of targeting hard-to-reach and vulnerable populations; (4) the challenge of building public resilience against misinformation; and (5) the lack of coordination within the sector (DCMS 2021b).

Both the Online Safety Act (UK Government 2023) and the Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS 2021b) have the merit of recognising that media literacy is essential in the digital age. However, they both present limitations, which underpin some of the main structural constraints that affect the UK media literacy sector as a whole. First of all, both documents approach media literacy in primarily protectionist terms. That is, they frame the concept as an essential requirement for identifying and managing online risks like misinformation, yet with less recognition of its more holistic role in fostering engaged and active participation in society (Gibson and Connolly 2023). The Strategy (DCMS 2021b), furthermore, places primary responsibility on civil society organisations for delivering targeted media literacy provision, rather than on DfE to embed mandatory and more robust media literacy education from an early age. This is perhaps not surprising, since DfE's reluctance to promote media literacy provision was evident from the beginning, when this responsibility was given to Ofcom under the UK Government's (2003) Communications Act (Buckingham 2025; Wallis and Buckingham 2016).

This issue, however, remains problematic, as reflected in the Strategy's expectation that civil society alone should shoulder the effort. Furthermore, the absence of a clearly defined role for DfE raises concerns about the feasibility of developing an overarching vision for promoting media literacy provision – a vision that should be grounded in cross-departmental collaboration undertaken alongside the work of Ofcom and broader policy interventions. Finally, the Strategy (DCMS 2021b) argues that media literacy provision is under-evaluated. However, while there is a lack of longitudinal research on the effectiveness of different forms of media literacy education for different groups (Anstead et al. 2025), what counts as 'robust' evaluation is a contested question – one that, as privileged by both the UK Government and Ofcom (2023), is skewed towards a positivist understanding of measurement and impact (Bicket et al. 2021; Thompson 2025).

In practice, while the formal education system should play a primary role in delivering consistent and effective media literacy as a set of lifelong skills, this form of education is not mandatory across the UK, where it remains patchy. In Wales and Scotland, it is formally embedded within national curricula, yet persistent challenges in terms of limited resources and teacher training undermine its practical implementation (Martzoukou et al. 2023; Williams 2023). In contrast, its place in the national curriculum for England is dubious, with provision remaining at the discretion of schools (Cannon, Connolly, and Parry 2022; Polizzi 2020). As a result, research shows that many teachers in the UK worry that formal education does not do enough to prepare children for the digital world – with only three in ten children reporting having had regular media literacy lessons since 2023 (Ofcom 2025b) – and that more support is needed for educators in terms of teaching resources and training (Fletcher 2021; McCarthy 2023). Promisingly, the UK Government (2024) recently commissioned an independent review of the national curriculum for England, which brings hope about the role of formal education in media literacy provision. Recommendations from this review suggest that media literacy education should be embedded more robustly across the curriculum, including primarily via English and Citizenship (Curriculum Assessment Review 2025). However, not only is it yet to be seen what their implementation and outcomes will entail but, while reaching children through formal education is already fraught with challenges, targeting adults is even more difficult, as most are no longer within any academic settings.

This is why both local governments and civil society organisations play a key role in catering for the media literacy needs of different groups (including both children and adults), which is well-documented both in the UK and more widely (e.g., Frau-Meigs, Velez, and Michel 2017; Hobbs et al. 2024; Melstveit Roseme, Day, and Hammonds 2024). In practice, both policymakers and organisations collaborate with various stakeholders (e.g., libraries, media outlets, internet service providers, online platforms) to promote media literacy across the UK. This aligns with Ofcom's (2024a) media literacy strategy, which aims to make media literacy 'everyone's business' (3). However, research on the views and experiences of these two groups is still under-developed. Notable exceptions include recent studies finding that, despite efforts to ensure consistency, media literacy provision in the UK for both children and adults remains fragmented, under-funded, and under-evaluated (Edwards et al. 2023; Ofcom 2022; Polizzi et al. 2024; Yeoman and Morris 2024).

Promisingly, both the UK Government (DCMS 2022) and Ofcom (2024b) have, in recent years, actively funded media literacy programmes and interventions across the country. However, without an overarching vision – one that fully recognises the primary role of formal education in promoting media literacy – these scattered efforts, however promising, are bound to remain short-lived and no substitute for meaningful and systemic change. What is more, we know that citizens' trust in the media, institutions, and expertise is increasingly low (Nichols 2017), with work commissioned by DSIT suggesting that citizens' (dis)trust undermines their willingness to engage with media literacy resources and initiatives supported by the government and delivered by organisations (Behavioural Insights Team, Yeoman, and Yates 2023). Finally, these issues are compounded by the existence of multiple approaches to media literacy, and this multiplicity is reflected in the fragmented nature of its provision. Citizens need a wide range of functional and critical skills and knowledge to use digital technologies both practically and safely, and to participate in society (Yates et al. 2020). The landscape of media literacy provision is therefore made more complex by this wide range of skills, with multiple organisations inevitably prioritising some over others.

While some organisations may focus on the critical skills required to evaluate online content and manage one's data privacy, others might prioritise the creative skills required to produce media content or the more basic functional skills necessary to use digital technologies. All these examples can be practised under the umbrella term of media literacy. To date, while researchers have mapped elements of the UK media literacy landscape (e.g., Yeoman and Morris 2024, examining news literacy provision in

schools), there have been fewer attempts to map the wider sector (e.g., RSM 2021). What is clear, however, is that the field is broad and fragmented, with the last official figure identifying over 170 UK initiatives, most of which operate at the local level (DCMS 2021b). As such, many questions remain, particularly in terms of the delivery and evaluation of such initiatives.

Finally, this is further complicated by the extent to which some of these initiatives fall under the remit of what is broadly referred to as digital inclusion. Research and practice tackling digital exclusion focuses on the gaps in digital access, skills, and knowledge among different groups (Helsper 2021; Yates et al. 2020). There are promising examples of research and practice that have looked, as part of broader digital inequalities issues, at the importance of developing citizens' functional *and* critical digital skills and knowledge. One of these examples relates to a new instrument designed to measure digital inclusion at household level (Yates et al. 2024). However, leaving these examples aside, the digital inclusion field is also fragmented, and has often prioritised the functional over the critical dimensions of media literacy. Ironically, even though media literacy is central to any meaningful vision of social inclusion in the digital age, in its fullest sense the concept encompasses notions of agency, participation and empowerment that are frequently marginalised or lost in translation within digital inclusion agendas (Eynon 2021). In practice, media literacy in the UK is often reduced to digital skills within digital inclusion frameworks or, as epitomised by the Online Safety Act (UK Government 2023), to a narrow focus on internet safety, all of which betrays an instrumental approach to measuring and delivering media literacy provision.

Research questions

If we are to better support media literacy provision in the UK, then it is important to explore in more depth the views and experiences of policymakers and civil society organisations tasked with this provision within different localities and media literacy ecosystems. This study focused on five areas to address the following questions:

RQ1: What are the views and experiences of policymakers and civil society organisations tasked with media literacy provision within different areas in the UK?

RQ2: What can we learn from each area in terms of best practice and challenges?

Methods

Research design: case studies and participants

Commissioned by Ofcom, this study was conducted by researchers from the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. To answer the questions above, the research team employed a qualitative case study methodology, focusing on five key areas in the UK, with each area serving as a case study because of its differences and specificities in terms of policy development and degree of media literacy activity. These five areas include: (1) Birmingham and the West Midlands, (2) Greater Manchester, (3) Liverpool City Region, (4) Scotland, and (5) Wales. This methodology was considered ideal for exploring in depth, and comparing, key features of each media literacy ecosystem. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a select number of policymakers and representatives of civil society organisations tasked with media literacy provision within each area. Table 1 below provides details of how many participants were recruited per area (anonymised as PM1-6 and CSO1-12 respectively), with 18 being the total number.

Even though interview data was collected from five different UK areas, this was a small-scale study given the limited number of interviews and the niche and elite nature of the populations of interest. As such, this article does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of policymakers' and organisation representatives' views and experiences of media literacy provision within each area, nor are the five areas chosen for this study representative of the UK as a whole. Rather, these areas were purposively selected as case studies because of their potential to generate meaningful policy and practical insights

Table 1. Number of participant interviews per area.

| Case studies | No. of policymakers | Acronyms used for analysis | No. of civil society organisations | Acronyms used for analysis |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Birmingham / West Midlands | 1 | PM1 | 4 | CS01, CS02, CS03, CS04 |
| Greater Manchester | 1 | PM2 | 1 | CS05 |
| Liverpool City Region | 1 | PM3 | 2 | CS06, CS07 |
| Scotland | 2 | PM4, PM5 | 2 | CS08, CS09 |
| Wales | 1 | PM6 | 3 | CS010, CS011, CS012 |

into the state of local media literacy provision, with a focus on digital skills development. Since this focus is central to both media literacy and digital inclusion, this study aimed to maximise heterogeneity of provision through the selection of three case studies (Scotland, Wales, Greater Manchester) that have explicitly embedded digital inclusion into policy and manifesto commitments, and two (Liverpool City Region, Birmingham and the West Midlands) that may be considered at an earlier stage of development. At the same time, while media literacy education is formally embedded within the national curricula of Scotland and Wales, this does not apply to England and, therefore, to Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, or Birmingham and the West Midlands.

In short, the selection of these areas as case studies enabled us to compare different media literacy ecosystems with differing priorities and degrees of strategic coordination, while also accounting for geographical, cultural, and governance variation, with Wales and Scotland being constitutionally devolved UK nations with distinct education systems. London was intentionally excluded to shed light on regional aspects of media literacy provision outside the capital city, which is generally regarded as an example of intensive digital activity and development. Furthermore, this study is limited by the absence of policymakers and organisations representative of Northern Ireland.

Participants working in media literacy (including with a focus on digital inclusion) were purposively selected through individual contacts and networks known to the research team, and through identifying relevant organisations and individuals via targeted internet searches. Participants were approached by email. Details about the type of media literacy work carried out by each participant are provided below as part of each case study. The interviews were conducted by members of the research team from the University of Liverpool. Written informed consent was sought from participants. The project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Liverpool and fieldwork conducted in July 2023–October 2023.

Data collection and analysis

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and were conducted online via Microsoft Teams at the convenience of participants, with two research team members in attendance, one leading the interview and the other taking notes. Two interview guides were designed by the research team – one for policymakers and one for organisations. Both interview guides included two main topics with a few questions that were the same for both policymakers and organisations: (1) context and work (e.g., ‘What type of media literacy is your focus – e.g., digital, data, information, traditional media?’), ‘Are you currently collaborating, or have you ever collaborated, with local partners and other organisations working in the same area?’), and (2) challenges and best practice (e.g., ‘What challenges, if any, have you experienced in the context of collaborating with local partners in this area?’), ‘What has worked effectively in the context of promoting media literacy?’).

In addition, the guide designed to interview policymakers included questions such as ‘What challenges, if any, have you experienced in the context of supporting and funding media literacy initiatives?’. Meanwhile, the interview guide used with organisations included questions such as ‘What challenges, if any, have you experienced in the context of supporting, delivering and/or evaluating digital inclusion/media literacy initiatives?’. Once recorded, transcribed, and anonymised, the interview data was thematically analysed using NVivo 20. The purpose of this analysis was to identify descriptive

codes, capturing the views and experiences of policymakers and organisation representatives, which were then aggregated under more abstract, overarching themes (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Findings

This section presents key findings organised around two main themes per case study: (1) collaboration and best practice, and (2) challenges. Prior to presenting each theme, a subsection on policy landscape and local strategies (based on relevant up-to-date documentation from each area) is provided for each case study along with details about participants and their media literacy work. Key findings from each case study are summarised in one table per subsection, with [Table 2](#) referring to Birmingham and the West Midlands, [Table 3](#) to Greater Manchester, [Table 4](#) to Liverpool City Region, [Table 5](#) to Scotland, and [Table 6](#) to Wales.

Case study 1: Birmingham / West Midlands

Policy landscape and local strategies

While no specific policy documents about media literacy have been produced by local government bodies in Birmingham, Birmingham City Council (2021) published a digital inclusion strategy highlighting the importance of developing citizens' *digital literacy*. Aims of this strategy included creating a joined-up approach to tackling digital exclusion, providing access to digital devices and affordable connectivity, and 'giving people the right skills' to navigate the 'complex [digital] landscape' (Birmingham City Council 2021, 2). As part of their strategy, the council provided funding for two years for a digital inclusion team to address gaps and coordinate initiatives.

Who we spoke to

- PM1 – works at Birmingham City Council and was involved in their digital inclusion strategy mapping digital inclusion/literacy provision across the city.
- CSO1 – works at a Birmingham-based organisation helping difficult-to-reach communities to access services and supporting parents and children to develop digital skills.
- CSO2 – works at a UK-wide organisation, with projects in Birmingham and the West Midlands, delivering media literacy and digital inclusion initiatives to older people and people with disabilities.
- CSO3 – representative of a scheme funded by a local government body in Birmingham, working with communities and housing providers and coordinating digital inclusion/literacy activities for older people.
- CSO4 – works at the library in Coventry and is a member of a UK-wide network for librarians. They deliver formal and *ad-hoc* training sessions supporting communities (e.g., refugees, asylum seekers) to be digitally skilled and included.

Collaboration and best practice

P1 explained that, according to their digital inclusion strategy, Birmingham City Council did not fund organisations directly, but helped them to find funding. Besides committing funding to extend their work after 2023, the local government established a digital inclusion network to meet regularly with organisations to talk about digital inclusion and digital literacy. Community partners included public bodies (e.g., Birmingham Public Health), industry (e.g., BT Group), and civil society organisations (e.g., Good Things Foundation). Workstreams within the network focused on aspects of digital inclusion such as devices and connectivity, with two workstreams dealing with digital skills development. As explained by P1: 'our role is ... to bring those organisations together and create a ... space for them to ... shar[e] best practice [... and] mistakes', with this network serving as an example of good practice.

Similarly, CSO2 run digital inclusion and media literacy projects in Birmingham and the West Midlands through collaboration with various stakeholders (e.g., housing associations, councils, charities) to reach their target populations (i.e., people over 65 and/or with disabilities) and provide them with digital skills support (in person and online) using volunteers. Meanwhile, CSO1, which works with partners such as ‘West Midlands Combined Authority ... , the NHS [... , and] Virgin Media O2’, provides digital skills and internet safety training for young people and adults in Birmingham. They also created an illustrated children’s book helping families understand the role of digital technologies in everyday life.

During the interviews, participants reflected on what they thought is effective for delivering media literacy initiatives. CSO2 explained that tailoring digital skills provision to the needs of individuals and avoiding technical jargon and terms like ‘digital inclusion’ and ‘media literacy’ is essential. CSO1 praised their use of participatory methods to co-design and co-deliver elements of their projects. What works best for them is ‘involving ... the people [they] are working with ... whether that’s through a focus group [... or] inviting them to speak to [them]’. Finally, CSO4 said that an example of good practice is finding ways to capture people’s attention and make their learning experience not just educational but fun.

Challenges

Organisations in Birmingham told us that one of the main challenges to their media literacy provision is funding. Because this is inconsistent, organisations struggle with uncertainty as to where to apply for funding. As remarked by CSO3: ‘it’s not easy to find funding’. Furthermore, because this is often prescriptive (as in prescribing the type of provision that funders expect organisations to deliver) it undermines organisations’ autonomy and expertise in delivering support.

Organisations may also find it hard to establish trusting relationships with other organisations. As mentioned by CSO2: ‘I think some organisations find it hard to let us in [and] worry that we’re gonna take over’. This is particularly problematic when organisations collaborate with partners whose remit is not digitally focused but provide access to specific groups, since they might lack digital skills themselves. Finally, the work of organisations in cities like Birmingham is challenged and made more urgent by the limited presence of media literacy in the national curriculum for England – a challenge that may begin to be alleviated following the curriculum review commissioned by the UK Government (2025). According to PM1, children need to be educated more robustly:

I would like to see a lot more education ... at nursery, at primary and secondary level ... around ... keeping children safe online ... and, whilst ... we’ve probably got this much media literacy in our current curriculum, ... there’s so much more that we can do.

Table 2. Birmingham/ West Midlands: key findings.

| Relevant policy documents | Relevant network/s | Examples of media literacy initiatives | Examples of best practice | Key challenges |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Connecting our communities and enabling a digital Birmingham: A digital inclusion strategy and action plan for the citizens of Birmingham</i> (Birmingham City Council 2021) | Digital inclusion network (established as part of the council’s strategy), with media literacy provision being discussed as part of the network | CSO1’s digital skills and internet safety training for young people and adults in Birmingham. They also created an illustrated children’s book helping families understand the role of digital technologies in everyday life | Establishment of digital inclusion network linking multiple stakeholders and facilitating knowledge sharing | Inconsistent, and often prescriptive, funding for organisations |

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

| Relevant policy documents | Relevant network/s | Examples of media literacy initiatives | Examples of best practice | Key challenges |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | CSO2's digital skills support for people over 65 and/or with learning disabilities | Collaborating with other organisations to access populations of interest | To establish trusting relationships with community partners |
| | | | Tailoring media literacy support to the specific needs of individuals | When community partners lack digital skills |
| | | | Avoiding technical language and jargon when delivering projects on the ground | Media literacy is not firmly embedded in the national curriculum for England |
| | | | Use of participatory methods to co-design and co-deliver, together with members of communities, media literacy projects | |
| | | | Finding ways to capture people's attention and make training/support not just educational but also fun | |

Case study 2: Greater Manchester

Policy landscape and local strategies

Despite the lack of specific media literacy documents produced by local government bodies in the Manchester region, documents were published to outline strategies to promote digital inclusion and digital skills development across the region. One of these documents include Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) (2023) 'Digital Blueprint 2023–2026' outlining the key priority of removing barriers to social mobility and employment through digital skills development. According to this document, a key enabler to digital inclusion is 'building digital ... literacy for life, education, work and business', which requires 'informal and community learning partnerships' within the third sector (26–27). Similarly, Manchester City Council (2021) published their 'Digital Strategy 2021–2026' to ensure that, besides having the right digital infrastructure, 'people [in Manchester] have the right digital skills and training' to thrive in the digital world (2, 9, 11).

Who we spoke to

- PM2 – works within the GMCA team leading the digital strategy for Greater Manchester. They work with organisations from multiple sectors that support digital infrastructure and digital skills development.
- CSO5 – works at a UK-wide organisation disseminating media literacy resources for parents/carers/professionals to keep children safe online. They ran a project in Manchester training young people to be 'digital champions' and teach digital skills and internet safety to others.

Collaboration and best practice

Local government bodies in Greater Manchester have established digital inclusion networks bringing together stakeholders from different sectors (e.g., policy, industry, civil society). Media literacy

provision benefits from these networks, given their focus on digital skills development, but remains outside their official scope. As discussed by PM2:

We've got a [GMCA] cross-policy team [... and a] local leads group that meets on a monthly basis, and the benefits of that ... are that ... people are sharing resources, sharing capacity, making sure that we're bridging the gaps so that there isn't a postcode lottery.

In 2020, GMCA also set up a Digital Inclusion Taskforce consisting of members from industry, voluntary sector, local government, health, and education/schools. In addition, the Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham, set up the Digital Inclusion Action Network, which targets under-25s, over-75s and people with disabilities.

During the interview, PM2 praised good leadership and coordination, which allows GMCA to avoid duplication of initiatives. Meanwhile, CSO5 recognised the importance of collaborative work with other organisations, emphasising that, when providing media literacy resources for parents and carers, signposting to other organisations is an example of good practice. Most of their resources aim to keep children safe online and support parents/carers. For CSO5, the delivery of their resources is more effective online as they can reach larger portions of the population. Whilst digital delivery cannot reach everybody, according to CSO5 it 'is really good' because you can quantify 'what's landing'. As they added: 'we're never gonna achieve the scale we want to see by meeting people where they are on the ground'.

Conscious that government funding for media literacy organisations is limited, CSO5 also discussed industry partnerships as an effective tool to disseminate their resources even more widely. While industry funding can bring commercial interests into socially driven issues, for CSO5 it has proven valuable, which is why they collaborate with 'the four telcos ... Sky, Virgin Media/O2, BT and TalkTalk'.

Challenges

Participants working in Manchester recognised the lack of a cohesive framework for promoting media literacy across the UK. This is not to downplay the accomplishments of those working in Greater Manchester to deliver meaningful media literacy provision. Even in a place such as Greater Manchester, which has a more developed media literacy ecosystem, participants still felt there could be more support. More specifically, a more overarching framework was discussed as a way to foster better coordination and communication about media literacy provision across the UK. Without such a framework, local policymakers and organisations rely on their own frameworks with the risk of operating in isolation. Furthermore, this can generate confusion, especially in terms of duplication of initiatives. As discussed by CSO5:

There needs to be ... demarcation of who's responsible for what, which there isn't at the moment ... [For example,] the fact that DSIT and Ofcom are doing incredibly similar things in slightly different ways, ... they're even putting up very similar grants and ... doing very similar research, ... that's not very helpful.

Table 3. Greater Manchester: key findings.

| Relevant policy documents | Relevant network/s | Examples of media literacy initiatives | Examples of best practice | Key challenges |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Digital Blueprint 2023–2026</i> (Greater Manchester Combined Authority 2023) | GMCA cross-policy digital inclusion team, with media literacy provision being discussed by the team | CSO5 ran a project in Manchester training young people to be 'digital champions' and teach digital skills and internet safety to others | Establishment of digital inclusion groups and networks linking multiple stakeholders and facilitating knowledge sharing | Lack of overarching framework for promoting media literacy across the UK, which can generate confusion and duplication of initiatives |

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

| Relevant policy documents | Relevant network/s | Examples of media literacy initiatives | Examples of best practice | Key challenges |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Digital Strategy</i> 2021–2026 (Manchester City Council 2021) | Digital inclusion local leads group, with media literacy provision being discussed by the group | | Leadership and coordination allowing GMCA to avoid duplication of initiatives | |
| | Digital inclusion taskforce, with media literacy provision being discussed as part of the taskforce | | Signposting to resources and initiatives delivered by other organisations | |
| | Digital Inclusion Action Network, with media literacy provision being discussed as part of the network | | Digital delivery of media literacy resources | |
| | | | Industry partnerships as a source of funding and tool to disseminate resources more widely | |

Case study 3: Liverpool City Region

Policy landscape and local strategies

To date, no specific documents about media literacy have been produced by local government bodies in the Liverpool region. However, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's (LCRCA 2021) published a digital strategy that includes a digital inclusion section outlining the importance of developing people's 'digital skills [, which] are a form of basic literacy' (3). Focusing primarily on the functional skills required to benefit the economy, the strategy argues that 'improving digital skills [... is] a major national challenge' (25).

Who we spoke to

- PM3 – works for a UK Government department, developing media literacy policy. They funded media literacy projects across the country, including a project in Liverpool offering training for women in functional/critical digital skills (e.g., basic skills, how to manage privacy online and spot scams and misinformation).
- CSO6 – works at a UK-wide organisation providing digital inclusion and media literacy support for adults with learning disabilities. They run a project in Liverpool, training people with learning disabilities to become 'digital champions' and support others about how to stay safe online.
- CSO7 – works at an organisation in Liverpool providing nationwide support for people with neurodivergences. They offer internet safety training for parents/carers and people with neurological conditions.

Collaboration and best practice

As part of their digital strategy, LCRCA launched their digital inclusion taskforce (comprising members from industry, the voluntary sector, health, and schools), which meets regularly to discuss local projects. In 2023, they set up a digital inclusion network for organisations promoting digital inclusion and digital skills development to share knowledge and resources. Media literacy provision is discussed as part of these initiatives, which are examples of good practice but focus primarily on digital inclusion.

Collaboration is also key to the work of organisations delivering media literacy provision within the region. Some of the internet safety training provided by CSO7 takes place in schools and colleges and is delivered to children with neurological conditions and carers and nurses. When asked what makes it effective, CSO7 explained that being neurodivergent themselves makes it relatable to their target audience. Similarly, CSO6 run school projects designed to support children with learning disabilities to stay safe online. CSO6 employ participatory methods (e.g., consultations) to tailor their provision to, and co-produce resources with, their end users. They said: ‘there’s absolutely no point in creating, designing, or making anything that you haven’t consulted with the end user about’.

Challenges

PM3 explained that it is difficult to discuss media literacy provision with different government departments, which contributes to a lack of national coordination of local media literacy initiatives. As remarked by PM3, the Department for Education (DfE) could deliver media literacy provision more robustly through formal education. However:

To get the[ir] attention ... , we need to dock into their existing agendas. You can’t just go to DfE and say ‘you need to do this’, because they’ll say ‘well, we’re doing all these other things, ... ‘it’s not as much of a priority for us, as you think it should be’.

Promisingly, an independent review of the national curriculum for England recently concluded that media literacy should be embedded more firmly across different subjects such as English and Citizenship (Curriculum Assessment Review 2025), with the UK Government (2025) showing a commitment to revising the curriculum accordingly. Meanwhile, communication remains a challenge for media literacy organisations collaborating with other organisations using, as remarked by CSO6, formal or academic language. Equally, government funding is another key challenge, being both limited and, as discussed by CSO6, prescriptive:

When government offers funding for a project, [they usually say] ‘we want this to be done for this money’ ... If [... they] said ... , ‘we want to reach people about improving their media literacy ... What could you do for £250,000?’ And then all the charities could bid for it.

Table 4. Liverpool City Region: key findings.

| Relevant policy documents | Relevant network/s | Examples of media literacy initiatives | Examples of best practice | Key challenges |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Digital Strategy 2021–2023</i> (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority 2021) | Digital inclusion taskforce, with media literacy provision discussed by the taskforce | CSO6’s media literacy projects linked to schools and designed to support children with learning disabilities to stay safe online | Establishment of digital inclusion taskforce and networks linking multiple stakeholders and facilitating knowledge sharing | It is difficult to discuss media literacy provision when communicating with different government departments, which affects the extent to which local media literacy initiatives are part of a more cohesive endeavour |
| | Digital inclusion network, with media literacy provision discussed as part of the network | CSO7’s media literacy training (with a focus on internet safety) for school children with neurological conditions as well as for carers and nurses working with people affected by these conditions | Media literacy initiatives for people with disabilities are more relatable when delivered by those who are also affected by the same disabilities | Communication between organisations can overcomplicate collaboration |
| | | | Co-production of media literacy training and resources with end users enables provision to be tailored to their needs | Government funding tends to be prescriptive, leaving little autonomy to organisations |

Case study 4: Scotland

Policy landscape and local strategies

The Scottish Government's (2021) most recent digital strategy aims to promote 'digital inclusion' (29) and the digital 'skills [... required to] find and evaluate information, and to communicate ideas creatively' (47). This document builds on a previous strategy (Scottish Government 2016) focusing on the benefits of digital technology for teaching and learning. While this earlier strategy aims to develop educators' and learners' digital skills, these are framed primarily in terms of economic productivity, with little mention of their benefits for participation in society and wellbeing.

Who we spoke to

- PM4 – works at a Scottish government body within a team aiming to improve teachers' digital skills and confidence. They focus on online safety and offer webinars for teachers.
- PM5 – works at the Scottish Government within a division that covered the Connecting Scotland programme focusing on digital access and basic digital skills development.
- CSO8 – works at an organisation in Scotland supporting disadvantaged communities, providing devices, basic digital skills training, and media literacy training about online safety and misinformation.
- CSO9 – works as freelance, based in Scotland, creating media literacy resources, and providing internet safety training, for educators and young people.

Collaboration and best practice

In 2020, as a response to the Covid-19 lockdowns, the Scottish Government (2023) set up the Connecting Scotland programme, providing digital access through provision of devices, data and digital skills support for people on low incomes. This programme, which has now been suspended, was supported by local authorities and third sector organisations. As emphasised by PM5: 'we wouldn't [have] be[een] able to deliver [support, including to vulnerable groups such as people] ... addicted to drugs ... , without collaboration'.

The Scottish Government is part of the UK-wide Technology and Digital Leaders network, which promotes the digital agenda across governments. When we spoke to PM5, they were setting up a national digital inclusion alliance to bring together different stakeholders in Scotland. Meanwhile, collaboration is also crucial to CSO8 targeting rural communities in Scotland to deliver provision of devices, data, digital skills and device support. As part of one of their projects, they delivered media literacy workshops on scam awareness and misinformation. They explained: 'I've got a referral network of over 200 organisations ... made up of ... public bodies and voluntary organisations'.

The lack of an overarching framework for digital inclusion and media literacy provision across Scotland was a motivating factor for CSO8's creation of their own framework, which is an example of good practice: 'we didn't wait for a framework ... , we just saw the problem and ... figured out ... what's gonna work in our location, [... so] we've developed referral systems [... and] completely created our own frameworks'.

CSO8's digital inclusion and media literacy provision relies on 'the notion that face-to-face [tailormade] support is more successful ... than remote support'. This was echoed by CSO9, who run a project assessing media literacy initiatives in a major city in Scotland. Meanwhile, PM4 remarked on the importance of training teachers to deliver media literacy provision through formal education, praising their intention to collaborate with a Scottish Government agency producing media literacy resources for teachers.

Challenges

One of the challenges discussed by participants from Scotland is finding common ground when communicating with different stakeholders. As emphasised by CSO9, media literacy 'has different meanings to different people' and, as remarked by CSO8, 'funding [... remains] a critical

issue’, since it is ‘highly competitive’ and prescriptive. Participants also mentioned that the government in Scotland is less developed in terms of networks compared to areas in England like Greater Manchester. Finally, as explained by PM4, media literacy education is not consistently delivered across Scotland, despite being formally embedded across the national curriculum: ‘there are schools who are really well invested in it but, ... because of the nature of ... our curriculum ... and nothing’s mandated [...] even the local authorities can’t dictate to schools [what to teach]’.

Table 5. Scotland: key findings.

| Relevant policy documents | Relevant network/s | Examples of media literacy initiatives | Examples of best practice | Key challenges |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>A Changing nation: How Scotland will thrive in a digital world</i> (Scottish Government 2021) | In the process of setting up a digital inclusion alliance across Scotland, with media literacy provision being discussed as part of this | Connecting Scotland programme, set up by the Scottish Government in 2020 and providing devices, data, and digital skills support focused on people on low incomes | Connecting Scotland programme, providing devices, connectivity, and basic digital skills support | To share the same language when communicating with different stakeholders about media literacy |
| <i>Scottish Government strategy for digital learning and teaching</i> (Scottish Government 2016) | The Scottish Government is part of the UK-wide Technology and Digital Leaders network | CS08 run a project delivering media literacy workshops to different communities (including in rural areas) on topics such as scam awareness, online safety, and misinformation | The establishment of a digital inclusion alliance to share knowledge and best practice | Funding, which is often prescriptive |
| | | CS09 run a project assessing media literacy initiatives in a major city in Scotland | CS08’s establishment of their own framework and referral mechanism to identify the needs (in terms of digital access and/or skills) of different communities | A less developed digital inclusion / media literacy network |
| | | | Tailormade face-to-face media literacy support | Media literacy is not firmly embedded in the national curriculum |
| | | | Training, and producing resources for, teachers delivering media literacy provision through formal education | |

Case study 5: Wales

Policy landscape and local strategies

Welsh Government’s (2021) digital strategy focuses on digital inclusion, aiming to ‘create a workforce that has the digital skills ... to excel in the workplace and in everyday life’ (8). Previously, the Welsh Government (2016) published the Digital Competence Framework, which is referenced in the strategy. This framework, which is mandatory across the national curriculum for Wales, highlights the importance of developing both functional and critical skills (e.g., in relation to creating/sharing online content and managing privacy and online abuse).

Who we spoke to

- PM6 – works within a Welsh Government team developing policy to regulate digital technologies and coordinating UK Government legislation (e.g., Online Safety Act).
- CSO10 – works at a media literacy organisation delivering, through partner organisations (e.g., youth clubs), digital skills training and informal drop-in sessions (e.g., on internet safety) for young people.
- CSO11 – works at an organisation providing media literacy support and digital skills training for teachers and young people to improve their information evaluation and media production skills.
- CSO12 – works at an organisation delivering training for young people (e.g., in digital skills and internet safety) and supporting organisations (e.g., to create better digital services).

Collaboration and best practice

As part of their digital strategy, the Welsh Government funded a digital inclusion programme, which has now come to an end, called Digital Communities Wales. Led by Cwmpas, this programme delivered digital skills training for frontline staff and volunteers helping others develop digital confidence. Cwmpas also coordinated a network set up by Welsh Government called Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales. This network provides a space for policymakers, public bodies, industry, and civil society organisations to share knowledge about digital inclusion across Wales, with media literacy being discussed as part of this network.

The Welsh Government is also part of the UK-wide Technology and Digital Leaders network, which allows different government departments, including the digital inclusion team, to share knowledge about digital and technology issues. Priority groups targeted by this team are older people, Black and ethnic minority groups, and people living in social housing. This team works closely with organisations like Ofcom who sit on the Digital Inclusion and Skills Programme Board. As explained by PM6, besides relying on formal networks they are regularly ‘in touch with colleagues from the other devolved nations’. When we spoke with PM6, they had actively shared, with stakeholders in Wales, Ofcom’s consultation regarding the development of best practice principles for media literacy by design. In addition, they mentioned the Welsh Government was going to respond to some of Ofcom’s consultations about the Online Safety Act.

Collaboration is also crucial to CSO10, which works with youth clubs to access, and deliver media literacy training to, young people in Wales. As part of one of their projects, they trained young people in how to recognise misinformation, especially during election campaigns. When asked to share an example of good practice, CSO10 explained that their support for young people is not limited to training but is about building a rapport. Similarly, CSO11, who also run projects to help young people identify misinformation, remarked on the importance of having an open conversation with young people about their use of digital technologies, something that it is not always happening within the household or in schools:

The most important thing you can do is to have a ‘how was your online day today?’ conversation because we don’t talk to our kids ... about what they see online ... so, just having a ... face-to-face debrief ... and questioning ... ‘is that real? Where does that come from?’

When we spoke to CSO12, they were running a media literacy project co-designing workshops with, and delivering these to, young people to encourage them to think critically about algorithms and what they see online. CSO12 praised the use of co-production methods as good practice, while also emphasising that training for young people should be designed in ways that are ‘engaging [... and] not boring’.

Challenges

PM6 told us that one of the key challenges in Wales is keeping media literacy provision high on the policy agenda, which involves communicating with different government departments. They said: ‘there’s lots of competing priorities [... and] financial constraints ... The point of the digital strategy

is to keep it up that policy agenda'. Meanwhile, CSO11 discussed two challenges to their media literacy delivery – the limited nature of government funding, and academic jargon, which makes it hard to collaborate with academics. Finally, another challenge stems from partner organisations (e.g., youth clubs) not always recognising the importance of delivering media literacy workshops for young people. As explained by CSO10:

[They think] young people are getting this from school [... and that] we don't need to do anything ... And [it's true that] young people are kind of being taught in school, but they're not having those informal conversations where they can ... ask ... questions.

Table 6. Wales: key findings.

| Relevant policy documents | Relevant network/s | Examples of media literacy initiatives | Examples of best practice | Key challenges |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Digital Strategy for Wales</i> (Welsh Government 2021) | Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales, with media literacy provision being discussed as part of this | Digital Communities Wales, a digital inclusion/skills programme funded by the Welsh Government and led by Cwmpas | The establishment of a digital inclusion alliance to share knowledge and best practice | Keeping media literacy provision high on the policy agenda amid competing priorities |
| <i>Digital Competence Framework</i> (Welsh Government 2016) | The Welsh Government is part of the UK-wide Technology and Digital Leaders network | PM6 worked with Ofcom to develop and implement codes of practice designed to regulate platforms and encourage them to promote media literacy by design | Informal discussions and regular contact with different organisations to discuss issues of media literacy provision in more depth | Government funding, which is limited and short-term |
| | | CSO10 run a project in partnership with youth clubs to access, and deliver media literacy training about misinformation to, young people | To provide support to young people that is not limited to the training sessions delivered but is about building a rapport, providing support more holistically, and having an open conversation about their use of digital technologies | The use of academic jargon, which can make it hard for organisations to collaborate with academics with expertise in media literacy |
| | | CSO11 run a project designed to help young people to cope with and identify misinformation online | Involving young people in the co-design of media literacy workshops delivered to this group | A reluctance from youth organisations to recognise the importance of delivering media literacy workshops for young people |
| | | CSO12 run a project co-designing workshops with young people. The workshops encouraged young people to think critically about algorithms | To ensure that media literacy workshops for young people are designed in ways that are engaging | |

Discussion and conclusions

This article presents key findings from a study exploring the state of media literacy policy and provision within five UK areas, with each area serving as a case study with its own differences and specificities: Birmingham and the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Scotland, and Wales. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with policymakers and representatives of civil society organisations, tasked with media literacy provision in each area, to explore their views and experiences (RQ1), with a focus on best practice and challenges (RQ2).

This study found that government bodies within all areas have established formal networks relevant to media literacy provision that allow stakeholders from different sectors (e.g., public, private, civil society) to share knowledge and best practice. However, not only are some of these networks more established or higher in number within some areas (e.g., Greater Manchester), but they are all primarily concerned with digital inclusion, with media literacy piggybacking on them. This is reflected in the policy documents produced by government bodies, with most strategies focusing on digital skills development from a digital inclusion perspective.

A wealth of media literacy initiatives were reported by participants from each area. Some of these initiatives support young people through training sessions (e.g., on internet safety). Other initiatives target adult populations (including vulnerable communities like older people), offering non-formal structured opportunities and/or tailor-made support for developing their digital skills. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when these initiatives are delivered by organisations primarily concerned with digital inclusion, they prioritise digital skills that are more functional (i.e., basic practical skills) than critical (i.e., those required to evaluate online content and the impact of digital technologies). This is consistent with research arguing that digital inclusion interventions across the UK promote digital skills development primarily in functional terms (Eynon 2021). Relatedly, it is noteworthy that many of the initiatives focus on media literacy in relation to internet safety and online risks such as misinformation, thus reflecting the protectionist approach to media literacy captured by the Online Safety Act (UK Government 2023) and the Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS 2021b) that permeates current UK policy discourse.

Within all areas, collaboration between organisations was found to be pivotal to the provision of initiatives and training, which echoes previous research on the UK media literacy landscape and role of civil society in delivering provision on the ground (Edwards 2023; McDougall, Turkoglu, and Kaniz'aj 2017). Collaboration may take the form of organisations delivering media literacy training in partnership with other organisations who have a different remit but access to target populations. Furthermore, it is central to most examples of good practice discussed by participants in relation to their work. These may include seeking industry partnerships as a source of funding and effective tool to disseminate resources more widely, keeping regular contact with different organisations, signposting to resources and initiatives from other organisations, and co-designing/co-delivering training and resources with end users, which is praised in the literature for better meeting their needs (e.g., Lacelle and Lalonde 2023).

Another example of good practice in supporting target communities, as discussed by participants, included the provision of tailor-made face-to-face support (e.g., through drop-in sessions); although, for others, digital delivery may be more effective. Also, while some organisations remarked on the importance of designing training that is both educational and fun, for others the task of supporting target groups goes beyond training and includes informal conversations about their use of digital technologies. These findings offer an overview of what works in media literacy provision in the UK, thus contributing to literature on the practicalities and effectiveness of delivering support in this area (e.g., Ofcom 2024b).

This provision, however, also comes with challenges. As found by other work (e.g., Edwards 2023; Polizzi et al. 2024), a consistently discussed issue was government funding, which is limited, short-term, and often prescriptive – i.e., prescribing the type of provision expected, which undermines organisations' autonomy and expertise in delivering support. Other challenges relate to how organisations communicate with stakeholders. Policymakers may struggle to discuss media literacy with different government departments due to their different priorities. As shown by the data collected as part of this study, this includes discussing media literacy provision with DfE, whose responsibility to more effectively promote media literacy education has been largely overlooked. This has been the case both from the outset, when this responsibility was assigned to Ofcom under the UK Government's (2003) Online Communications Act (Buckingham 2025), and in more recent policy documents such as the Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS 2021b). Problematically, government silos and limited cross-department communication

can make it difficult to keep media literacy high on the policy agenda, which may affect, in turn, the extent to which local initiatives are delivered as part of a more cohesive endeavour. Meanwhile, organisations may find it hard to share the same language with different stakeholders (with academic jargon overcomplicating collaboration), or to establish trusting relationships with community partners.

When it comes to reaching children, several participants thought that media literacy should be embedded more robustly within the school curriculum, which echoes research on the need to better promote media literacy through formal education (e.g., Cannon, Connolly, and Parry 2022; Polizzi 2020; Yeoman and Morris 2024). This was perhaps to be expected, given the marginal place of media literacy in the national curriculum for England – an issue compounded by DfE's limited proactive engagement with media literacy education as a strategic priority. Promisingly, the UK Government (2024) recently commissioned an independent review of the national curriculum for England, with the hope being that a revised curriculum will place more emphasis on the skills that children need in the digital world. Recommendations from this review suggest that media literacy should be embedded more firmly across different subjects, with a primary focus on English and Citizenship (Curriculum Assessment Review 2025). The UK Government (2025) has expressed a commitment to acting on these recommendations, although their implementation and outcomes are still to be seen and evaluated. In the meantime, even though media literacy is embedded within the national curricula of Scotland and Wales, participants remarked on its delivery remaining inconsistent because of the autonomy that schools have in implementing the curriculum, or the limited opportunities that students have to engage in open conversations about their use of digital technologies both within and outside school settings. These findings build on previous work in this space on the extent to which persistent challenges, including limited resources and teacher training, undermine the actual implementation of media literacy education in Scotland and Wales (Martzoukou et al. 2023; Williams 2023).

Meanwhile, and beyond the task of reaching children, this study found that an overarching framework for better coordinating media literacy provision across the UK is much needed, as argued by previous work (e.g., Edwards et al. 2023; Polizzi et al. 2024). This should include a clear demarcation of responsibilities across government departments. As shown above, the absence of such a framework exacerbates the fragmented nature of the media literacy landscape, prompting some organisations to create their own frameworks to identify and better meet the digital needs of their target groups. Problematically, policy documents like the Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS 2021b) have only further contributed to, rather than helped resolve, the current fragmentation and lack of coordination within the broader UK media literacy sector. Not only has the Strategy overlooked the full responsibilities of actors like DfE in promoting media literacy, but has also placed the primary onus on civil society, thus undermining the possibility of developing a genuine overarching vision for promoting media literacy more cohesively. More widely, UK policy discourses about media literacy, as captured by the Online Safety Act (UK Government 2023), have contributed to a narrow and protectionist approach to media literacy – one that privileges instrumental measurements of media literacy in relation to internet safety and digital inclusion, with less attention being paid to notions of agency and active participation in society (Eynon 2021; Gibson and Connolly 2023).

This study was not designed to provide a comprehensive overview of media literacy policy and provision within the five selected areas. Given the study's small-scale nature and sample size, this article is limited to providing a snapshot of some of the key features of media literacy provision within each area. This snapshot is far from comprehensive and not intended to suggest that each media literacy ecosystem presents characteristics that are necessarily different to those of other ecosystems. The question of whether – and if so, to what extent and in what ways – some of the key findings from this study apply more broadly to different areas and the UK as a whole is one that warrants attention and should be addressed by future research conducting larger studies.

As the UK media literacy landscape continues to evolve with initiatives and projects either concluding or being undertaken, this study offers insights into some of the challenges and

examples of best practice that can help current and future policymakers and civil society organisations to better deliver media literacy provision in the UK. This article shows what some within these two groups find effective and challenging within five UK areas. Future research should build on this study to explore the nature and future directions of media literacy provision both locally and across the UK.

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