



Communications and Digital Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Media literacy

Tuesday 22 April 2025

3.30 pm

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Members present: Baroness Keeley (The Chair); Viscount Colville of Culross; Baroness Fleet; Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill; Lord Holmes of Richmond; Lord Knight of Weymouth; The Bishop of Leeds; Lord McNally; Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge; Baroness Wheatcroft.

Evidence Session No. 5

Heard in Public

Questions 68 - 85

Witnesses

I: Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Assistant Professor in Digital Media and Communications, University of Birmingham; Dr Emma Stone, Director of Evidence and Engagement, Good Things Foundation; Marc Davies, Digital Programme Lead, Cwmpas.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Dr Emma Stone and Marc Davies.

Q68 **The Chair:** I am now pleased to welcome our second panel of witnesses. Thank you very much for joining us today. My name is Baroness Barbara Keeley, and I am Chair of the committee. Can I start by asking you to introduce yourselves, starting on my left?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: Hi. I am an assistant professor in the linguistics and communication department at the University of Birmingham. I have been doing work in media literacy and related areas such as digital literacy, digital inclusion and digital citizenship for almost 10 years in this country. Just prior to my post, which started on 1 April, I was working as a research fellow at the University of Liverpool, working with Emma Stone on some of our projects but also with others from the team on a number of relevant projects.

Dr Emma Stone: Hello, I am director of evidence and engagement at a charity called Good Things Foundation. We are the UK's leading digital inclusion charity, so obviously that shapes the perspective that I bring here today. Among other things, we co-ordinate a national network across the UK, comprising several thousand small community organisations, many libraries and other organisations that in some way and to different extents have a shared interest, reach and relationships in wanting to respond to digital exclusion barriers among the people they work with and in their communities.

Marc Davies: Afternoon. I am digital programme lead at Cwmpas, a social business development agency based in Wales. We have been running a national digital inclusion programme in Wales for the last 20 years and I have been working on it since 2005, so I have a fair bit of information on digital inclusion. We also run a digital media literacy programme pilot for Ofcom in one county in Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf, RCT, in south Wales, and that has been active now for about two and a half years.

Q69 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** We have just heard a very interesting panel largely about children and schools, so it is the issue of adult media literacy that we really want to get into with this panel. To start with, can you just say how much of a problem you think media literacy is among adults, and to what extent would the term be recognised among most of them?

Dr Emma Stone: I said at the start that our perspective as a digital inclusion charity will shape my response to that. There are two things. The first is that when it comes to talking about the essentials in terms of what we all need to be able to navigate and access an online world, I find it quite hard to focus on media literacy as separate from also thinking about digital literacy and digital inclusion in the round. That does not only come from our experience of working through community organisations. This is where it picks up on your second point about how

people relate to terms. I do not think most of us would wake up in the morning and think, "Yes, I want to become media literate today"—or even digitally literate. So the point is really about, in the offline communities and people's local communities, people with whom you have trust and relationships. It might be a library, a community centre or a family hub—it is about being able to go to places where they might offer support if you are feeling at sea in this online world.

That also takes account of the fact that the goalposts really are shifting. You have heard that, and you have heard the urgency now. The things that we are talking about today are different to what we might have been dialling up and talking about three years, five years or 10 years ago. So for us that means that we can talk about the importance of different literacies such as media literacy, AI literacy and digital literacy, but we need to think about those as needing to be built up and layered on a foundation that is digital inclusion.

Gianfranco mentioned—actually, Cwmpas has been involved in this as well—that we have been involved in a significant piece of research called the Minimum Digital Living Standard research. That has asked members of the public, "What is it that you feel a household needs"—that is different from an individual—"to feel digitally included in society today?" Through a highly structured process of deliberation with professionally recruited members of the public—these are not people recruited because they have got experience of digital barriers or because they are highly digitally engaged—members of the public have thought really hard and reached consensus about the level of kit and connectivity that you need. That is the devices and the broadband, but also the practical and functional skills you need at a basic level but to participate, and the critical thinking skills that you need to understand and manage digital risk: things that you might have in your minds when you are talking about media literacy.

So when it comes to members of the public, they might not relate to the term "media literacy", but they have been absolutely able to identify those different elements that we might then attribute different labels to. The key thing is that households are then saying that all these are needed in combination in order to be able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence. I think that is where I would go to in terms of what all this means: it is about enabling people to engage with opportunities in the online world safely and with confidence.

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: I just wanted to answer your first question, which is about how much of a problem is the lack of media literacy among adults, not just children. I am not going to cite stats and some of the figures we know already from Ofcom. Its annual survey highlights that there are massive gaps in critical thinking skills, which adults need in order to evaluate content and information—to understand the role of online advertising, for example, and the role of platforms—or when it comes to understanding basic notions of algorithms and how those shape

issues of filter bubbles and your exposure to information. So that is a massive problem.

Also, something I think we need to be conscious of is the fact that children and adults are not necessarily separate entities. Children will not remain children for ever—they will become adults. A lot of the conversations we tend to have around the needs of adults when it comes to media literacy start from the recognition that there are issues, flaws and problems with the education system and formal education when it comes to media literacy provision. Media literacy as a subject is currently not firmly embedded in the school curriculum. We know that a review is currently being undertaken by the Department for Education, and I think the hope among media literacy scholars and practitioners like myself is that it will be more firmly embedded in the school curriculum. Ideally, that subject should equip children with lifelong skills that should enable them also to be able to use these technologies safely, critically and with confidence when they grow up.

In the UK specifically, precisely because of some of the issues that we have with the education system, we have witnessed something really interesting. On the one hand, we have a very vibrant kind of media literacy sector when it comes to civil society. Lots of third-sector organisations and charities do excellent work in different regions and in different localities across the UK, trying to cater for the needs of specific groups—and by groups I mean children, young people and adults. At the same time, though—I echo what was said before—there is a lack of co-ordination when it comes to media literacy provision across the country. So there are gaps in communication between government departments but also in different regions and media literacy ecosystems, if you will.

To just finish by going back to what Emma was saying, digital inclusion and media literacy are not the same thing but they also overlap in significant ways. My personal view is that if you are in a room with people like myself and Emma, we are on the same page in terms of what digital inclusion will mean: oftentimes we have taken a very comprehensive approach to digital inclusion which focuses not just on digital access and equipment but on digital literacy skills, both the functional and the more critical skills that you need. But this is not necessarily the case across the board. If you are looking at how digital inclusion has been understood, operationalised and translated as practice in a lot of different ecosystems, you will perhaps find organisations that might prioritise the functional skills, or organisations that prioritise digital access and equipment over digital skills in the first place. Whereas media literacy carries that connotation of critical thinking, that is surely at the heart of that concept. So, if you take a holistic and comprehensive approach to digital inclusion, it is absolutely important that you think of both concepts as overlapping and crucial to one another.

Q70 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** As a user, it is also much easier to know that you do not have the equipment than it is to know whether you are media savvy, or however you want to put it. But, Mr Davies, you have had experience over a long period of dealing with adults who probably are

not media literate to start with in the conventional sense.

Marc Davies: Yes. Our experience of the term “media literacy” and people’s recognition of it 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. It is a bit of an alien term for them. But when the discussion goes a little bit further and you try to give them examples of fake news, misinformation or scams, they start to understand it a bit deeper. It is at the top level: when you say to the general public, first of all, “Explain media literacy to me”, they are stumped. But that does not mean to say that when that conversation gets richer, you cannot go deeper into areas that are specific to them and then into things such as algorithms and the feeds that they get on their own personal channels. It goes into a different direction then. But compared to digital inclusion, I completely agree with what they are saying here, which is that that is the first step, and media literacy for me is the natural next progression on from that.

Q71 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** While catching people in schools is obviously a much easier route, have any of you found that there are particular routes that enable media literacy in its broadest sense to be taught to adults, and some which simply do not work?

Marc Davies: It has to be pitched. Again, we are talking adults here, which is a huge spread of demographics, and we know that there is no “one size fits all”. So, if you are dealing with more senior adults or senior citizens, it has to be pitched in a way which is relevant and understandable to them. Likewise, if the age group is different, you have to make it relevant at every level, because there is no way you can take one kind of style of learning in and it will work across the board. That is our experience, anyway.

Dr Emma Stone: Over the last few years, there have been quite a few pieces of research, some commissioned by Government—DCMS and DSIT—undertaken by people such as Gianfranco, and some commissioned by Ofcom, which have been looking at the media literacy landscape and what works. A lot of the conclusions there are quite similar to what you would get from our evidence base and others if you were to look at the digital inclusion aspect, taking that more holistic approach. It is about trusted messengers that have the reach and relationships, and about the flexibility and being able to identify what is relevant to the individuals—the thing that matters in their lives. People will often talk about finding the right hook, or may even talk about whether it is digital or media literacy by stealth. In other words, you are not necessarily badging it as “Come here and get your media literacy”.

The key there—this is where we move from individuals into systems and into things such as thinking about lifelong learning and the social infrastructure that we have—is that it can be more straightforward to respond to someone’s needs around, say, not being able to afford mobile data if you are a member of the National Databank and you can meet that need, or someone’s practical needs, such as, “I’ve got a device; how

do I use this to start searching using Google?”, for example. What we hear also is that with the shifting goalposts and with misinformation, disinformation, fraud, scams, online safety and AI—I have not heard that term come up but that is another thing that is shaping the environment within which we are all talking and thinking—there is a real need for people who are on the front line, who are in community organisations and centres and in libraries, to have the support, resources and upskilling that they need.

When we have done research into how we can help to build some AI understanding among people who have no or low digital skills and confidence, the community organisations and others in the network that we support are telling us, “We feel pretty overwhelmed about this ourselves. We don’t feel we have the confidence and capability that we need, let alone then being able to provide that”. I think, Gianfranco, you were absolutely right: we are on the same page in terms of how the ideal is a holistic approach, and it is a tailored approach. But when you have got the people who are best placed to provide that and they feel uncertain and at sea, that is something where there is a role for Government, and maybe there is a role for the regulator in responding to that, in that upskilling.

Q72 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** What should the Government do, then?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: We conducted a piece of research at the University of Liverpool not long ago, which was commissioned by Ofcom, with civil society organisations, third-sector organisations and local government within key regions across the UK to try to understand what best practice looks like and what kind of challenges practitioners on the ground are facing in providing media literacy opportunities, not just to children and young people but to adults, who we know are hard to reach. Some things came out prominently as things that really work and were praised by practitioners—for example, the development of local networks. A lot of these networks are digital inclusion networks, but they also incorporate discussions around media literacy provision. Those are really helpful.

There were lots of different forms of collaboration between organisations and charities to target specific groups. You may have a charity that has a digital inclusion remit but, to target a specific group that it does not have access to, would work closely with another charity that does something slightly different but works with that specific population. There were lots of interesting examples of good practice. It is important to be aware that these examples are important when we are thinking of scaling things up. If we are to map the landscape, to understand what works and what does not and to reach adults, there is a lot out there but there are also a lot of gaps and not just good practice.

We need to understand what works, but a lot of challenges were also discussed. One challenge discussed across the board by all the people we interviewed as part of the project was government funding. A lot of practitioners face precarity—not being able to have staff, the expertise

they have within their teams—because the money runs out. They have limited funding for a couple of years, if they are lucky, and then they cannot continue working on the ground. Some people talked about how prescriptive a lot of these funding calls are about the type of provision that they expect organisations to undertake, instead of being a bit more open and saying: “This is a pot of money we have. We know that you are the experts and know what to do on the ground. What can you do with the money?”

Q73 Lord Knight of Weymouth: I should declare that I am a patron of the Good Things Foundation, where Emma works. I am interested in the policy changes that would make the greatest difference in improving media literacy for adults in the UK. What is your assessment of the previous Government’s 2021 media literacy strategy and what impact did it have?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: I remember that, in 2021, I was working on a digital literacy project and was really enthusiastic when the online media literacy strategy was published by DCMS. Now, obviously, media literacy is under the remit of DSIT. It was a brilliant effort in the sense that there was a clear recognition of some of the problems that the media literacy sector as a whole was facing—being underfunded and underresourced, and the issue around co-ordination. But even though that was an admirable piece of work, in some ways it did not have a long or considerable impact. It incorporated a framework around what media literacy entails as a concept and there was a lot on the role and responsibilities of platforms in particular, but the strategy was short lived.

For the following two or three years, we could see that DCMS funded projects and commissioned research—a piece of research was commissioned for the Behavioural Insights Team to look at people’s understanding of media literacy opportunities and some of the gaps in terms of uptake, all of which was super helpful. But what is still needed in terms of next steps is an overarching framework that does not necessarily spell out what media literacy entails as a concept but looks at media literacy provision across the country and spells out the kind of roles and responsibilities of different actors and stakeholders, across the private sector, the public sector and civil society, in making that happen. That is still missing. Surely, as I said before, that kind of framework needs to be accompanied by funding opportunities that can really make a difference in supporting the work of practitioners on the ground.

Q74 Lord Knight of Weymouth: We have heard from Ministers that it is not just down to Ofcom to do all this, but clearly Ofcom is taking a lead on it. What is your experience of working with Ofcom?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: I could not agree more. I am a member of Ofcom’s Making Sense of Media research, evidence and evaluation working group. It was in the Communications Act 2003 that Ofcom was first given some role in promoting media literacy. Since then, it has done so in multiple different ways through its research. It has been doing

annual research to track levels of and gaps in media literacy among the general public, establishing different working groups and a task force and commissioning work and research. Its own media literacy strategy came out not long ago. That is really admirable but, as Ofcom said in the last media literacy strategy, media literacy should be everybody's business.

To echo what was said before, I do not know whether the Government have deliberately outsourced media literacy provision just to Ofcom, but I agree that Ofcom on its own will not be able to make this work for the whole country in a way that is systematic and efficient. There should be more involvement from other bodies. For example, as mentioned before, cross-government efforts are really needed. If you look at the digital inclusion action plan that came out not long ago, you will see that a lot of Ministers and departmental bodies are part of that initiative. We need something similar for media literacy.

- Q75 Lord Knight of Weymouth:** We will come back to that. We are told that Ofcom has commissioned a number of programmes and initiatives as pilots. Thirteen organisations were commissioned to do media literacy interventions, which have reached just 2,717 participants so far. It feels pretty meagre to me. Do you have any assessment of whether what it is funding at the moment is giving you anything to learn from?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: On what has been going on for the last couple of years, the same thing applies to DCMS to some extent. As part of the online media literacy strategy, it was commissioning research and funding lots of small-scale projects. That is good because there is a lot of nuance and variation depending on localities and contexts, so you want to understand what is happening on the ground within specific localities and regions. That is helpful, but oftentimes these are small projects. There are also massive issues in our field around the evaluation of what really works. Ofcom has emphasised multiple times that the sector is underevaluated. There is also an issue around utilising proper robust methodologies and instruments; not every single organisation running an intervention has the resources to conduct an evaluation.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: On that, does Ofcom have the resources? Is it giving this enough priority?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: It has done amazing work. It has published an evaluation toolkit, for example, and developed a bank of outcomes that practitioners and people involved in evaluation initiatives or media literacy interventions can use as part of their work, and has done so in collaboration with experts and by talking to practitioners. It has definitely made some progress within the sector, but there are bigger issues around available funding, which allows practitioners to work closely with academics and utilise certain instruments or develop new instruments if they are to conduct robust evaluations of what really works.

- Q76 Lord Knight of Weymouth:** Thank you. Marc, you are working with Ofcom on the funded project in Rhondda, which has now been extended with more money.

Marc Davies: Yes, and prior to that we were involved in the roadshows and evidence gathering leading into the current strategy that it launched in October 2024.

We have done end-user research and are delivering these sessions, testing content, seeing what works, testing different demographics and reaching a wide range of people. Digital inclusion is quite clear, in Wales anyway. About 7% of the adult population is categorised as at risk of being digitally excluded. Media literacy is a much broader canvas. You are talking about probably a quarter of the population across different ages. We have to test what works in reaching different audiences. That is what the pilot is doing, and that is feeding back into the frameworks that Gianfranco was talking about. We can then evaluate what is working and what is not working.

It is all right having all the strategic elements, but you must listen to what is happening from an end-user perspective as well. That is key. You can have all the strategies in the world, but if it does not work on the ground, it will not mean much in your outcomes.

Q77 Lord Knight of Weymouth: You are confident though that Ofcom have enough priority on this and are broadly doing the right things?

Marc Davies: Well, there is never enough. There are 22 counties in Wales, but we are working in just one. What we are doing is inequitable and probably unfair because one county is getting more of an opportunity than the rest of the country. It needs to be universal coverage. Digital inclusion is a nationwide programme. It is there for everybody in Wales, bilingually and universally using the same content. Unfortunately, we are not in that position yet with Ofcom, but that is where we need to get to with media literacy, because it is a critical area of work.

Q78 Lord Knight of Weymouth: Finally, segueing into Emma, do you think that there is a danger that if we come at this starting from digital inclusion and extend it into media literacy, it becomes an afterthought and that really we need something quite discrete?

Marc Davies: The terminology needs to be clear because they do overlap. In its strategic documents, Ofcom has got a Venn diagram with digital inclusion, media literacy and online safety being as one. It is that middle bit, that sweet spot, that we need to get to. Whatever it is called does not really impact Joe Bloggs on the ground. He needs awareness-raising and universal material that is the same for everybody. That is the danger. It is a bit piecemeal at the moment.

Q79 Lord Knight of Weymouth: Emma, I am interested in your reflections on the 2021 strategy, whether you have anything to add and your experience of working with Ofcom. From you I am also interested in exploring what we can learn from the digital inclusion work, particularly the more comprehensive digital inclusion action plan that the Government recently published and what we can learn from that on

media literacy.

Dr Emma Stone: Beginning with a reflection, looking back to the 2021 media literacy strategy, some of our frustration was that it was an online media literacy strategy but, as this committee knows, there was not a digital inclusion strategy. I have some very positive things to say about some of the work that Ofcom has been doing in terms of the evaluation framework. To your point about small numbers, Ofcom is now within its current three-year strategy providing some support to the Good Things Foundation to enable us to review “Learn My Way”, our online learning platform. That is about basic digital skills. We have been reviewing that against the media literacy outcomes framework and identifying content that might need to be augmented or new content added.

It goes back to that point about how you layer on, which speaks a little bit to your point about the discrete versus embedded. I do not think that it is an either/or. If you have tools and support around what you are already thinking about, the digital literacy skills, what you need to do, then thinking about how you use that to build and embed those aspects of critical thinking and media literacy makes a lot of sense. It is supporting us to augment the content, but the resources do not go far enough and are not enabling us to roll that out and support those community organisations, libraries and others to take advantage, learn and put that into practice. None the less, it is better than not providing that support.

We had two programmes running—Ofcom’s programme and the DCMS/ DSIT programme, both supporting initiatives and doing research in parallel. The nature of the relationship between any Government and any regulator is complicated. I do not doubt that there were attempts made to join up where appropriate, but the appropriateness is tricky territory. That makes me question the extent to which, irrespective of good work done, Ofcom is the right lead for supporting and driving up media literacy, thinking about adults, communities and schools.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: There would be other contenders.

Dr Emma Stone: Yes, it links to the digital inclusion action plan, of which we now have the first steps. There is recognition in that of a lack of join-up across AI literacy, digital literacy and media literacy. There is reference to cross-government sponsorship of a more coherent framework, and there are several references and acknowledgements of the fact that you have DfE involved in terms of Skills England and the curriculum. There is also DWP, if we are thinking about the skills that you need in the workplace, which should include some of the things that we are talking about. You have reference to the join-up across DSIT and DCMS in thinking about libraries and their role in media literacy.

The question really is: who owns this? If we are talking about refreshing the essential digital skills framework, surely that is an opportunity to integrate media literacy and the basics of AI literacy into that framework. That framework ought to be owned by Government. If digital inclusion is DSIT’s responsibility, it probably ought to be owned by DSIT, even if

there is cross-government sponsorship. Whoever takes it on needs to be working with different government departments and, potentially, the regulator, but the ownership is needed.

The Chair: This leads quite well to the next question.

Q80 **Baroness Fleet:** Thank you very much for coming today and enlightening us about your work. It really is very helpful.

Clearly there are real problems in designing and delivering media literacy to adults. Most adults will not know what you are talking about, frankly. All they want to know is whether they get a connection, which is still an issue. I am glad that it is still quite high on the agenda.

To drill down a bit, if you are trying to sell the idea of media literacy, I do not think that a lot of adults will know what you are getting at. Why do you want to help them? Are you trying to protect them? Do you want to help them to understand the difference between fake news and real news? Do you want to help democracy? What is your sell to people who perhaps are not highly educated?

Obviously you are dealing with a very wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds when you are talking about adults. You have media literacy ranging from zero to very considerable. Who chooses organisations that know how to connect with adults? How do you tell them that it is important, and what do you tell them?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: It is a great point. I start by saying that media literacy as a concept is very versatile. We have talked a lot about critical thinking and misinformation, but media literacy is not just about misinformation and critical thinking. Critical thinking is a core aspect. Often it is entwined with elements of creativity. This sometimes gets lost in translation because we prioritise things around internet safety and critical thinking in that context, forgetting that there are also elements around empowerment, creativity, participation and citizenship.

Media literacy is such a rich concept that incorporates multiple dimensions. You are asking a good question: how do you sell that to adults who probably do not even understand the phrase? They might think that it is not relevant to them.

I will cite a piece of research that was commissioned by DSIT a couple of years ago. The Behavioural Insights Team conducted a piece of work to understand levels of awareness of media literacy among the public and uptake of initiatives. Unfortunately, the findings are not really promising. What came out prominently is that levels are pretty low. Adults might rely on just an online search or a YouTube video to do something related to media literacy, rather than pursuing opportunities provided by charities that have lots of experience in this sector.

A factor that stood out as a problem—and perhaps a cause—was low levels of trust in institutions and organisations in the first place. That needs to be tackled. In terms of having that conversation with adults and saying, “You need media literacy”, there is a ton of research showing

that media literacy is important for internet safety, well-being, participation in society, citizenship, responsible behaviour and for developing digital resilience. You talked about resilience in the previous session. Those conversations can be tailored in ways that can be more appealing to a specific group—on well-being, participation, citizenship, whatever that group is interested in. Media literacy is such a rich, versatile concept that it can be applied to multiple domains usefully.

Dr Emma Stone: It is a brilliant question, and I have very straightforward answer. You could start with the National Digital Inclusion Network that we co-ordinate. You are talking about thousands of community organisations, public libraries and community libraries which are in the network because they are interested in enabling people to thrive and benefit in an online world.

I know that the committee has received evidence around measurements and thinking about the self-reporting and how you know whether something is making a difference. There is another way of looking at this. How do you know if, within society, you have enough organisations with people who have the skills and understanding to be able to be there when things go wrong, to be able to respond to people's interests, respond to people's needs, to do exactly the things that Marc was describing?

You are absolutely right that it will not happen through imposing a short curriculum of media literacy training on everyone and saying, "This is there for you". One of the lessons from the essential digital skills qualifications in England and that framework is that people are not using that because they are not wanting formal education which takes 45 hours to get the basic digital skills that they need. It is about trust, about trusted messengers, relatable content, things that matter to people. You need skilled practitioners who can tap into that.

Q81 **Baroness Fleet:** If, for example, you got rid of the phrase "media literacy", and said to a less well-educated adult, "I can help you with your computer, with the internet, I will help you to access your bank account online, I can help with your NHS app", they would perhaps find that helpful. Those things are very practical. Talking about media literacy is a huge barrier when they know what they think about things, who they want to vote for and are vaguely interested in news. Older people might value news sites more. The evidence shows that they do. How can you convey to adults that what you call media literacy can engage them in useful things that connect them with people, help them to make friends and so on?

Dr Emma Stone: You are spot on there—that is the hook. It is being able to respond to the things that interest someone and the skills that we see in community organisations and staff and volunteers in libraries being able to listen to that. You then open up the conversations, which might be about how to spot fraud or scams or about searching. Nowadays, if you go on to Google and search, a generative AI overview

comes up. You might start with giving someone that practical information, and already AI is forcing its way into that conversation.

This links to the funding point, because the problem is not only the lack of funding. There is a problem about funding in England being skewed towards qualifications which are not meeting people's needs. However, to your point, there is funding available in some areas to use the NHS app. If the outcome that you are measuring is whether someone has registered on the NHS app, that is not funding that is conducive to an organisation being able to support someone to build their wider understanding and take someone on a digital inclusion journey.

This is where some of the silos at policy level become problematic when they are translated into funding streams that then result in siloed interventions that do not do exactly as you are saying, and do not respond to what people need in order to navigate in their lives.

Q82 **Baroness Fleet:** Sorry to push on, but Marc, with your experience, can you respond?

Marc Davies: Yes. It is the easiest sell in the world. You do not want your grandparents being scammed. You do not want older people being scammed. You want young people to develop career opportunities. If they are irresponsible online or not media literate, they are falling into a category where they probably will not get past first base in an interview process.

People are not aware that they are in echo chambers. They have fallen into it because of maybe an interest they have shown online, and suddenly they are believing all the things that they are hearing. They are not aware of how their data is being processed when they are agreeing to something or doing a quiz online which is quite enticing. It is building those critical skills that the internet has dumbed down in society. It is vitally important. Why should people be buying non-accredited health products? There are products all over social media for curing cancer, for skin conditions, for various ailments, being targeted at people unduly.

That should not be happening, but it is happening. Unless we teach people the broad context of media literacy, it will continue to happen. When people have had the session, even a one-hour session of going through all this, they come out much more educated and better digital citizens. Otherwise, they would be continuing the same old bad habits, the same things that will trip them up somewhere along the way. It is vitally important that the general awareness-raising is there, even if it is just to stop them from reacting to emotive content. Why is emotive content coming up on my social media platform? You have been targeted by that content because somewhere along the line it has selected you. However, they do not realise that and think that it just happens to be coming their way when in fact it is driven content. They need to be fully aware of that because it is wrong.

Q83 **Lord Holmes of Richmond:** What lessons have you learned from past or ongoing media literacy projects in overcoming barriers to adult

participation in the UK? What promising initiatives or policies have you seen in terms of addressing adult media literacy? What have you come across in terms of good practice at a local or regional level which is worth considering scaling nationwide?

Dr Emma Stone: To some extent I will recap on some of the things that I have already mentioned.

I will start with the last one, which is really interesting. We have been talking a lot about Government and different government departments, but obviously a lot of policy, practice and funding in this area is devolved in terms of adult education budgets. I have alluded to how some of that funding might be better used. A lot of the community organisations that are members of the National Digital Inclusion Network would be too small. They are reaching different groups of people. They would not have the accredited frameworks in place to be contracted to provide that sort of level of qualification.

To recap what works, it is about enabling those organisations that already have trusted reach and relationships. We know outreach and engagement can be a real challenge, so it makes sense to go to those organisations that are trusted by different populations and where the support can be provided by "people like me", so it is relatable in terms of who you are getting support from as well as it being a welcoming, friendly and inclusive environment. That really matters for people who may face multiple barriers and for whom learning in more formal education settings, such as further education colleges, will just not be a space where they particularly feel comfortable.

That said, we have had a really positive experience of working with three different mayoral combined authorities to do a pilot that was funded by the UK Community Renewal Fund. That took a place-based approach to work with and resource community organisations as part of a wider referral network, so that, where individuals did want to progress on to further learning, including potentially informal education settings, then they had the support to be able to do that. Those networked approaches are really valuable and they create an additional layer of support and resource.

I mention that because there is something about not seeing the local or regional and the national as separate. Ultimately, you are looking to be able to think about what is available at that hyper-local level, how that can be better co-ordinated as part of a local place-based approach, which has emerged through the research and work of DSIT, DCMS and Ofcom in this territory, and then thinking about where there are good regional networks in place and at the devolved nation level. One of the possible risks that the Government's digital inclusion action plan faces is that they can absolutely understand and see the value of the local, but a lot of the great examples in the digital inclusion action plan first steps are places that have had years of working really hard at this. That is where the national is needed alongside the local and regional, because otherwise we will continue to see a postcode lottery in the support that is available to people.

Lord Holmes of Richmond: For my benefit, how are you defining hyper-local?

Dr Emma Stone: So that could be at a neighbourhood level, but it will vary depending on which part of the country you are in. Some of the organisations that we work with in more rural areas, for example, will have a van rather than a premises and do mobile outreach to village halls.

Marc Davies: We have adopted an asset-based community development approach in Wales—a stakeholder group where each stakeholder has an interest in media literacy of some sort and can cascade it to their workforce. That works really well. We are working with an ethnic-minority group around misogyny and their lived experiences. We are creating a film on that and circulating it around those networks. I would love to work more with the mainstream media and reach busy people, because that is the problem at the moment. People who are in work and parents running around after children are the kind of targets I would like to reach. We have “lunch and learn” sessions through LinkedIn pages, but I would really like to do more with the mainstream media, because after the Netflix “Adolescence” programme, there was a massive spike in the interest in media literacy across the work we were doing. There is something mainstream media could do there to reach more people at scale.

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: I might recap some of the things that I have said. There are examples of good practice. There is research, as Emma was mentioning, including the kind of work that we have done, which really shows that there are things that are working, like the establishment of networks. There are also forms of collaboration among or between organisations. There are also organisation representatives. I talked about the importance of, for example, co-producing materials. Co-production, as you know, has come out as an example of good practice but, at the same time, there is a balance between offering structured, more formal learning opportunities alongside tailor-made, ad hoc support. That includes the digital champions models, which are mushrooming in this country and show a lot of potential.

Like Emma said, there are a lot of examples of good practice at a local, regional level, but there are also gaps at regional levels. But what is really lacking is that overarching vision. Moving forward, my hope is that we are at a juncture. We are seeing some admirable initiatives such as the digital inclusion action plan across Government and how much it involves different government departments. I think and hope this will also happen with media literacy in the near future.

Q84 **Lord Holmes of Richmond:** What are the learnings from some of those gaps you identify there?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: Oftentimes there is the big question of how to reach certain groups in the first place, because some of those issues around media literacy are so intertwined with digital inclusion and exclusion issues. Providing media literacy means that everybody must be

digitally included, at least at a very foundational level, because otherwise you cannot teach those more advanced critical thinking skills that are needed. Issues around digital exclusion are important and, again, I reiterate the point around funding, support and resources, which is absolutely vital.

Q85 The Chair: I do not know if this is a question to throw in at the last minute or if any of you will have an answer, but we understand that, from the government figures, £4.34 million is available and there is a DSIT budget of £3 million for funding media literacy projects. Clearly you could do more with more funding, but how much do we need to really tackle this in this country, get it all across the piece and not have one area of Wales with it and 21 areas without? Has anybody done any work on that?

Dr Gianfranco Polizzi: I cannot give you a figure, but what came out prominently from people working on the ground in multiple areas across the country is that they feel that our funding is still limited. It is short term, inasmuch as a lot of people experience issues of precarity. They cannot really retain their expertise because of how the funding landscape works in the first place. Again, there is also the prescriptive nature of calls. Considering changing a little bit the nature of some of those calls to make sure that they are less prescriptive and a bit more open, so as to prioritise the expertise of organisations working on the ground rather than necessarily having clear expectations as to the type of provision that those funding calls entail, is something I have definitely heard from a lot of people doing fieldwork in this country.

The Chair: Marc, what would it take in Wales?

Marc Davies: As much as you can give, I suppose. The platforms have something to say here. They need to be contributing more towards the bigger-picture stuff. It is not just about looking for government funding. It needs to be backed up by something else from the private sector. We have been running digital inclusion programmes at scale across Wales for, as I said, about 20 years. It is impossible really to put a figure on it, but you are looking at almost the type of figure you mentioned just for Wales per annum.

Dr Emma Stone: This is where I would really encourage the question to be wider than media literacy and think about digital inclusion that has media literacy embedded within it. I also will not give you a number, but there is something here about the ongoing investment that will be needed because of the technological change that is happening. This is about a commitment across not only government departments but parties to refreshing, reviewing and thinking about what individuals, families, communities and those in a position of being able to support people need. One of the frustrations has been the short term, the pilot, the "What can we learn?", and then the question about how that is sustained and scaled. However much money is available, it has to be a multiyear commitment that lasts beyond any one government term.

The Chair: That is really helpful, as the whole session has been. Thank

you very much. Your input has been very valuable. Your points about funding are a real takeaway from this session, as well as the need for co-ordination and your very good point about who owns this across all those silos in government departments. I understand that it is very frustrating, Marc, for you to be the sole project in Wales, but it is good that you are there.

Marc Davies: It has been great; I am enjoying it.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed.