



Communications and Digital Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Media literacy

Tuesday 20 May 2025

2.30 pm

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

Evidence Session No. 10

Heard in Public

Questions 178 - 209

Witnesses

I: Cerys Griffiths, Creative Director for Education, BBC; Patricia Hidalgo, Director of Children's and Education, BBC; Lindsay McCoy, Executive Editor of BBC Verify, BBC.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Cerys Griffiths, Patricia Hidalgo and Lindsay McCoy.

Q178 **The Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this meeting of the Communications and Digital Committee. We are now broadcasting live. My name is Baroness Barbara Keeley and I am the Chair of the committee. I am very pleased to welcome our witnesses today, who are here to discuss the role of the BBC in developing media literacy in UK audiences. A transcript of today's discussion will be taken, and our witnesses will have the opportunity to correct that transcript where necessary. Could I ask the witness panel to introduce themselves, starting with Cerys Griffiths?

Cerys Griffiths: I am the creative director for BBC Education.

Lindsay McCoy: I am the executive news editor of BBC Verify.

Patricia Hidalgo: I am the director of children's and education for the BBC.

Q179 **The Chair:** Thank you. In light of the BBC's mission and the public purposes outlined in the royal charter, can you tell us about the BBC's role and responsibility in developing media literacy in UK audiences?

Patricia Hidalgo: I will take that. As we know, AI and social media are here to stay, and are not very much understood, specifically by parents and by children alike. As our responsibility is to educate, inform and entertain children, it is very important that we have support for parents as well as children to be able to understand the long-term impact that social media and AI could have in their education and in their lives.

We do this through four brands. We have four main brands across children and education that dedicate themselves to different types of education and to media literacy. The first one is CBeebies. When I spoke to you before, I let you know that we have changed the way CBeebies will be addressing entertainment and education by also incorporating support for parents. We have taken a lot of the support content that we have developed with BBC Bitesize under the CBeebies brand, and we will be launching a parenting club with a website and with other content that will be dedicated to helping parents to understand media consumption and how to help their children get ready for school, from the use of screens to how they consume media at very early stages of their lives. It is very important that parents understand how that will have an impact in their early years' education.

Moving on from CBeebies, we have Bitesize. By the time children get to the age of five or six and they enter school, Bitesize is there for them. Bitesize is one of the best and most used platforms for children in the UK for revision of their studies. Not only that, but we also create support materials that are focused on delivering media literacy and helping children to understand fake news. Cerys will talk a little bit more about what we do there, but we also have "Live Lessons", which goes directly into schools. The "Live Lesson" we did for internet day, which is very

much loved and attended by schools and children, last year had more than 700,000 students viewing it. That also talks about the importance of understanding media and how it affects them.

Then, of course, "Newsround" is a fantastic programme we have had for over 50 years now. It is the longest running news programme for children in the world. What it does is amazing. Not only is "Newsround" trusted by teachers and loved by students, whenever there is any major event happening in the world teachers tell us that they wait until the "Newsround" bulletin is on so that they can tell their students what has happened. They do not want to take a risk and do it themselves; they trust "Newsround" to bring the truth and the explanation in a way that is safe for them. That means that "Newsround" is fact-based and trusted, and it helps children to understand media and fake news.

Then we have iPlayer. All our content is always supportive of any new developments or things that are happening in children's lives because we want to help them make sense of the world. We create programmes and then situations within scripts of our dramas, so that they can then understand how to navigate when they are facing the same challenges in life.

That is how we are organised. I want to pass on to Cerys, who will give you a little bit more colour on some of the detailed work that we are doing.

Cerys Griffiths: With regards to Bitesize, I will start with primary-age children. We do a "Live Lesson" every year supporting Safer Internet Day, and this year it was focused on scams. As Patricia said, 750,000 school children were reached with that "Live Lesson". That is a large number of people, and it is probably our highest audience that we have for "Live Lessons", which indicates how seriously schools are taking it at the moment.

For primary-age children, on Bitesize for Teachers we have a fairly new suite of videos and teacher notes that we have created. Primary schools tend to frame it as internet safety, so it supports internet safety and some media literacy learning. We launched those in January, I think, and we have had about 117,000 unique visits to that resource already since then.

For secondary school, we do quite a lot and we have been ramping it up over the last couple of years. We do "Other Side of the Story", which is very much focused on media literacy. With "Other Side of the Story" we have three approaches. One is around social media and our web content. We have web pages on Bitesize branded "Other Side of the Story", with lots of fun videos and quizzes for teenagers to do. We also have a social media presence for them on TikTok and Instagram, attempting to reach them where they are with similar content but in shorter form. We have teacher resources that link directly to our "Other Side of the Story" content.

We also do workshops. These are quite resource heavy, but every year we aim to go into 10 schools. We always focus on schools in areas of

high deprivation because the research shows that students in those areas are twice as likely to be influenced by fake news and disinformation. We focus on those areas. We go into 10 schools, and we do two workshops over a period of time, with fun, interactive, engaging content around getting them thinking about bias, balance, clickbait and all those knotty issues within media literacy. We get good feedback from those, but they are quite resource heavy so we can only manage about 10 a year. We have reached so far about 10,000 students through that means.

Lindsay McCoy: BBC Verify is quite keen to get into the media literacy space in terms of what we can do with the expertise that we have around disinformation, debunking fake news and understanding where stuff comes from. We are working directly with "Newsround" to try to have social media literacy videos placed on the "Newsround" website. We are working closely with Patricia with Bitesize and learning some of the lessons from "Young Reporter", with outreach workshops with schools teaching some of the stuff in particular around social media and disinformation.

Q180 The Chair: How do you think that you will reach the scale of what you can do compared to the need out there? There is a lot of criticism of media literacy generally in that initiatives are often small scale, so not reaching very many of our children and young people. We know that that is an issue. What is the impact of what you are doing, and the numbers of people reached? How do you think that compares with other public service broadcasters?

Cerys Griffiths: I would not be able to comment on the comparison with other public service broadcasters. Our own reach has been increasing. The best way to reach students is through teachers. I suppose at this stage our biggest challenge is cutting through the noise for students. There is a lot going on in their social media lives, so it is cutting through with content that they think is important and that they will pay attention to. They are obviously big users of social media and big consumers of all kinds of different news, but understanding the need to have the critical thinking approach to it is not necessarily there yet.

Our workshops are small scale at the moment. We are looking at ways that we can cost effectively increase the number of workshops we do. Last year we managed to double it because we worked with our colleagues in Northern Ireland, who we trained and gave resources to. They delivered a further 10 in Northern Ireland, and we are hoping to have similar conversations with our BBC colleagues in Scotland and Wales as well to do something similar there. It is resource heavy and if we had more resources, we would do more in the workshop space.

As for our web content and our social media presence, in the last 12 months we had 4.1 million views of our social media content on Instagram and TikTok, so that is a pretty broad reach. Our website has grown 19% year on year. We get on average 48,000 unique visits to the site every week. What is hard to tell is whether that is teachers or

students because it is not a signed-in proposition, but if it is teachers, then you could amplify that reach by a class as they are usually coming to it because they want to use it in the classroom.

We are doing what we can with the resources we have. Obviously, more resources would mean we could do more, and we are very keen to do more.

The Chair: Lord Knight has a follow-on question about reach.

- Q181 **Lord Knight of Weymouth:** Patricia, I just want to delve a little bit more into BBC's media literacy responsibilities, as you perceive it, to adults, because most of this session will focus on younger people. In particular, some time ago now we had the National Year of Reading, and we had storylines in "EastEnders" as an example. Netflix has done "Adolescence", which created a national conversation, or an international conversation, about media literacy. Do you see media literacy as being something important for the wider BBC output?

Patricia Hidalgo: I am only here to speak about children, but I do believe that it is important. As I said at the beginning, we are very focused on helping parents navigate media. You have to start there. The parents of today did not grow up with parents who understood social media or knew any of the effects of the way people are consuming content today. We do not even know ourselves what those effects will be. It is extremely important that we educate everybody.

In my case, my responsibility is concerned with parents having the tools to understand what that means and how they can tell their children to behave or how much screen time or social media time is appropriate and what is not. I remember when I was a kid I was told not to speak to strangers in the street. Now they are not in the street, they are in their own bedrooms. That is a problem and "Adolescence" raised it, but we all knew about this before. It is important. I do not know whether you want to speak about how news tackles this.

Lindsay McCoy: I think that there is a real public purpose for BBC News to tackle it. That is in the form of investigating social media, some of the things that it does and the platforms and algorithms that it serves up. It is the job of everybody. A lot of people who are parents or people my age did not grow up with mobile phones, so we are not as familiar with it. It is equipping them with the tools. If you talk to teenagers, they are quite media savvy in lots of ways and perhaps their parents are not as media savvy, which in some ways "Adolescence" exposed. I think that there is a real purpose for BBC News to lean into that. A lot of that would come from my team, from people such as Marianna Spring and Ros Atkins.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: If there is any written follow-up around drama and the wider BBC output that you might want to send to us, that would be gratefully received.

Lindsay McCoy: It is a good point because even last year we did Scams Week, which was an overall thing giving people the tools to understand

how they can avoid scams. That went everywhere, from “The One Show” to “Morning Live” to “EastEnders” to everything. There might be something that we could work up around that.

The Chair: It is about just seeing parents in some drama struggling with the issues that you know parents are struggling with—if they saw that being handled in a dramatic sense. Clearly, “Adolescence” gave that example of what can be achieved by drama in terms of generating questions and having people critically engaged. Lord Dunlop has a follow-up question.

Q182 **Lord Dunlop:** You mentioned a number of different initiatives. Is it possible to say how much annually the BBC invests in media literacy initiatives? Is that something from a governance point of view that you look at in that holistic way?

Patricia Hidalgo: Do you mean how much in terms of cost?

Lord Dunlop: Yes. Is it possible to say what budget each year the BBC allocates to media literacy initiatives? Tim Davie has talked a lot about this, which suggests that at a governance level this is something that is important. Can you tell us how much you are investing in media literacy initiatives?

Patricia Hidalgo: There are a lot of things that we are doing that integrate media literacy in the education we do. It is hard to split things in terms of how much is media literacy and how much is maybe about mental health and helping navigate media literacy, or whether it is about anti-bullying. That is social media literacy because you have to understand the impact to others of what you do in social media. It is complicated to try to split it up, but we can look that up for you and give you a sense.

Lord Dunlop: I think that would be interesting to find out what scale we are talking about here.

Patricia Hidalgo: Yes, absolutely. We will do that.

Q183 **The Chair:** As a final point from me, we did have evidence from the Voice of the Listener and Viewer that public service broadcasters, including yourselves, are not producing enough programming that encourages critical engagement with media. It noted that although they are not even very expensive programmes to make, cultural criticism programmes seem to be in decline.

That is just a thought—some evidence came into us that there used to be more of that type of programme. Clearly, if it is important for young people to question media, then it is important for all ages to question media and what is propaganda in what is coming at you. I do not know if you want to answer it now or later, but I just raise that.

Patricia Hidalgo: We have “Other Side of the Story”. Do you want to talk about that?

Cerys Griffiths: Yes. It is not a television or radio programme, but “Other Side of the Story” is aimed at critical thinking—giving teenagers the tools and the skills to look at information and assess it critically without telling them which way to think.

The Chair: We are not just thinking about teenagers, as Lord Knight was saying. We are thinking about adults, too. That is just a view that we have received.

Cerys Griffiths: It is probably not one that we can answer, being from children’s education and news.

The Chair: We will find some way of putting that question to your commissioning colleagues.

Patricia Hidalgo: We will take it away with us and come back.

Q184 **Lord McNally:** Thinking about getting messages into programmes, I believe “The Archers” started as a programme to encourage farmers to use various methods and such, so it does work.

I am a little bit worried. If I am at home and at 9 o’clock in the evening I decide to watch the news, I look at my agenda and I can watch the various news programmes. However, at 9 o’clock on the BBC is BBC Verify, which makes me ask: what is BBC Verify? What is it doing that the other four or five national broadcasting news programmes are not—are they all fake? Why suddenly rebrand a product called BBC News, which I trusted implicitly, and which I think that the world does, with BBC Verify?

Lindsay McCoy: Are you talking about the news channel at 9 o’clock?

Lord McNally: Yes.

Lindsay McCoy: I think that programme runs a slot. There is a slot for three hours every afternoon that is branded BBC Verify on the news channel, which we fill with as much BBC Verify content as we can. BBC Verify is a different way of doing our journalism because it is about using the different tools and techniques that are available for open-source journalism to seek out the truth and get to where we get to. It is no comment on BBC News. It is a different thing altogether that we do.

It is partly using stuff that is not freely available to gather. The stuff that we report on is quite often in places that you cannot freely get journalists into. You cannot easily access the information, and you cannot get camera crews into the countries where these things are happening. That is what we are trying to do.

It is an added value to BBC News; it is not a replacement for it. I am surprised it is always running at 9 o’clock, though. They must be rerunning some of the good afternoon stuff. The content is in tabs.

Q185 **Lord McNally:** Are you testing the name and the programme in any way?

Lindsay McCoy: It was set up two years ago and we did some audience testing one year in, which showed positive growth in the brand that the audience was happy with, and it increased trust in BBC News. That is partly because what we try to do is show the audience how we get to the conclusions that we get to. The evidence shows that, if they can see how it is made, they can trust what it says. That is the strapline that we use. That is where it came from and that is the genesis of it. It came to bear massively during the general election last year when fact checking was at the helm, but BBC Verify is more than fact checking. It is also about open-source journalism. It is about debunking disinformation, and it is about analysis as well.

Q186 **Lord McNally:** When you start making subjective judgments, I suppose Gaza is the biggest challenge, perhaps Ukraine, because the idea of fact-checking becomes extraordinarily difficult. The validity of opinion can depend on many things. Do you think that BBC Verify is having an effect on the way the BBC reports its news or on how other broadcasters and newspapers report their news? Are they sensitive to being fingered by BBC Verify?

Lindsay McCoy: I am not sure about your last point. Overall, Gaza is one of the most difficult issues to cover, partly because the BBC cannot freely operate inside Gaza. We are desperate to try to get in; we are desperate to show it. The option that we have at our disposal is using the open-source footage that comes in and for my team to be able to verify it.

Quite often when something awful happens, whether it is in Gaza or in any other part of the world, there is a lot of footage that comes out that is not necessarily of the incident that has taken place. It is up to my team to be able to verify that and to say: that is new, that is of that incident, it is geolocated and it is located for the right amount of time.

The service that we provide to the rest of BBC News is invaluable because we support our teams who are reporting on the Gaza conflict to help them use information that we know is true, correct, new and accurate. From that point of view, we are adding value.

Then we do our own reporting on stories like that. For example, for the bomb blast in the European Hospital last Tuesday night, we reported on that on Wednesday and Thursday. We were able to explain where the strikes had happened, how it had happened, what weapons were used and the people who were injured as well.

Q187 **Lord McNally:** How much do you think public trust remains in BBC News, given the scrutiny it gets in terms of accuracy? It is a very fragile asset you are dealing with.

Lindsay McCoy: Yes. BBC News is the most trusted news provider in the UK, but we do not take that for granted. We work hard every single day to earn that trust and increase that trust. You are right that we have to fight for it every single day and we do that by having people reporting all round the world. For the places that we cannot report, it is about using

assets and resources and teams like mine to help to support the trust we want to get into the news.

Q188 Lord McNally: How much internal exercise do you do to sustain resilience among those who work for the BBC?

Lindsay McCoy: I probably do not know enough generally about the BBC. I know enough in my team, and the people in my team are looking at pretty distressing footage daily. There is all sorts of care that we provide around mental health support, peer support and ensuring that people are not looking at distressing content day after day.

I do not think that I have ever known such an extraordinary time to be a journalist and such high pressure. We were dealing with three or four different conflicts last week, all at the same time, all in succession. It is a massive pressure, and the pressure to get it right and to be fair, accurate and impartial is something we all live to do every single day.

Q189 Lord McNally: One of the things that comes up time and again in the evidence that we receive is that young people do not get their news that way, but they go to TikTok. There are two things. Is it safe to allow our children to grow up relying on 90-second-at-most bursts of information without analysis or verification? Is there anything we can do about it?

Lindsay McCoy: Young people will get news where they want to get news, so I do not think that we can have a huge amount of influence on that. If you look in particular at the general election, we had a huge spike in numbers of young people coming to BBC Verify because they were hungry for facts. The evidence shows that young people—I sound old saying that—want more information and more analysis. The rise of podcasts, deep analysis articles and long videos on YouTube is something that I am not sure people could necessarily have predicted.

Equally, if people are getting their news on TikTok or on Instagram, it is important that BBC Verify is there. I have made it a real commitment of our team that we produce a social video pretty much every single day—getting to that information, debunking those stories, and helping them to understand what is going on inside Gaza. It is important to get to them on those platforms where they are.

The Chair: Baroness Fleet has a follow-on question that she wants to ask.

Q190 Baroness Fleet: I am a former journalist, and I am fascinated by what you are saying. I am very interested in BBC Verify because BBC Verify itself has made mistakes. You raised Gaza. There are sometimes a number of people who do not believe that BBC Verify and BBC journalism is an accurate reflection of what is happening in Gaza because most of the footage—we all know why—comes from Hamas. Therefore, it is by itself propaganda. I do not quite understand how you can justify BBC Verify as a means of verifying facts when you yourselves are approving the use of known propaganda.

Lindsay McCoy: It probably goes back to the earlier point, which is that we would love to be able to freely report from inside Gaza. We cannot, so we have to use the information that is available to us.

- Q191 **Baroness Fleet:** If it does not have a health warning to say that it is propaganda produced by Hamas, how do you therefore tell people that it is disinformation? It is not even misinformation; it could possibly be disinformation. You are in a difficult position because you are using only the material you have but, for example, if there is a quote from a health authority in Gaza, you do not see the Hamas politician or spokesman visually because they do not want to be seen. Therefore, you are putting yourself in a very difficult position of saying that you are verifying facts when actually you are having to verify propaganda.

Lindsay McCoy: The point you raise about the health ministry is an interesting one. In any BBC article or output, we describe that as the Hamas-run health ministry or the Hamas-run civil defence agency. I think that is important to say to the viewers.

Baroness Fleet: Yes, but if the information is coming from Hamas, you are not being shown the image of the Hamas spokesman—mostly—because they do not want to show the image. I am just saying that you are in a difficult position and therefore BBC Verify, in some people's minds, undermines itself because it is not necessarily verifying facts.

Lindsay McCoy: The footage comes from a variety of different sources inside Gaza and from people living there. It is obviously massively reduced because of connectivity issues and all the rest of it, but it comes from a variety of sources. We are clear to credit it when we know where it has come from.

The Chair: Viscount Colville wants to come in on this one.

- Q192 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** I want to carry on with the whole issue of misinformation because, after all, that is what is so crucial. Poor Lindsay—I am sorry, we will keep pushing you.

Lindsay McCoy: It is all right.

Viscount Colville of Culross: One of the battles always within the BBC has been the attempt to try to get an objective truth with trying to be impartial and having to give balanced opinions. With misinformation, there are various different truths. How do you decide how you will relay that information if there are various different views that cannot necessarily be refuted but people need to know that there is not one clear objective view on how things are?

Lindsay McCoy: How we treat misinformation and disinformation is that we have always had two main bars for reporting on it. Sometimes there is a risk of amplification as much as anything if we do it. This is around whether it is causing harm to individuals or whether it has gone viral and is appearing in lots of people's social media feeds. That is our bar for doing it. Quite often when we report it, it is not necessarily the debunking of misinformation or disinformation. It is trying to understand

what might be behind it or who the actors are who might be behind it. That is an important editorial lens to apply to it.

Increasingly, the fire of disinformation that is proliferating in all content is huge, so there is a bit more of an agenda for us to try to cover it a little bit more. Misinformation is trickier as people could be sharing it because they believe it to be true and it is not necessarily for bad purposes. Disinformation definitely reaches a higher bar than misinformation necessarily.

- Q193 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** Are you doing any partnerships with any tech platforms? I know that the BBC always very much has a walled garden and does things for itself, but if you are using one of the most trusted brands in the world in order to put forward what you hope is trusted information, are you approaching any of the tech platforms out there?

Lindsay McCoy: We work closely with a lot of companies and brands to try to get the understanding of this issue. For example, C2PA, which is watermarking, is an industry-led thing that the BBC is part of. That was in conjunction with some tech companies and lots of other news organisations.

There is a lot of work going on around fake images and the proliferation we are getting of that. We are working closely and hoping to have a result reasonably soon around a fake image detector, which would automatically detect fake images. That is not something that the BBC can do on its own. It is something we should do in partnership with other people as well.

The Chair: Lord Knight wants to come in with a final question.

- Q194 **Lord Knight of Weymouth:** It is a quick one. Personalities have always been important in building trust, from Sir David Attenborough through to "John Craven's Newsround" and then Ros Atkins maybe at the beginning of Verify. How do you balance landing, particularly with the younger generation, the trusted individual or influencer they go to as a trusted source, against landing a brand like Verify, which, as my colleague has said, creates the danger that it makes the rest of the news seem like it is unverified?

Lindsay McCoy: You would struggle to describe an outlet that is more branded than BBC Verify, I have to say, with our massive blue lozenge. It is plastered over everything.

I think that there is a rich mix and there are different ways of doing things. There are different ways of doing things for different audiences. Ros did an amazing explainer video on President Trump's visit to the Middle East last week. It was quite long for us; it was six and a half minutes. It did well on YouTube, and it did well on the website on Sunday. It was on the front page, and that is a Ros message.

Sometimes, if it is a bit more like, "Is Katy Perry's dress fake?" and, "Is that an AI image of the Met Gala not this year but last year?", that can

be done in different ways. That is not necessarily a Ros Atkins thing. Marianna ended up doing that in the end, but other people can do it as well.

Sometimes it is quite personality driven and sometimes it is the story that dictates it. Sometimes the platform does not want a lot of reporter interaction, it just wants the images of the story and the graphics that come with it. It depends, really, on what outlet you are targeting.

The Chair: I should tell you, to put a slightly different slant on things, that members of the Youth Select Committee of the Youth Parliament who we met here last week told us that they use BBC Verify to assess content seen on social media, so you do have a group in the Youth Parliament that rates you.

Lindsay McCoy: That is good. That gets me up in the morning.

The Chair: That is good to know, is it not?

Lindsay McCoy: It is lovely to know. Thank you.

Q195 **Lord Mitchell:** In a recent speech, Tim Davie said, "Imagine if we could provide every single child in the UK with proper training on disinformation". Well, of course, that assumes infinite resources and we do not have them, so let me pose the following question. What BBC resources are available to support media literacy education in schools and how do these align to the national curriculum?

Cerys Griffiths: I have described what we are doing in quite a bit of detail already. The new thing this year is that we have created a suite of resources for secondary school teachers that will directly link to our "Other Side of the Story" content.

As for how our content aligns to the national curriculum, it is very difficult because what would be helpful from a teacher and schools point of view is for it to be prioritised. We get the sense that teachers are on the front line of dealing with a lot of the issues that lack of media literacy creates around disinformation, fake news, and toxic masculinity. They tend to be dealing with it in a reactive way rather than having media literacy embedded into the curriculum as a subject that they have to teach. It is in the curriculum; it is a priority. That is one issue. Potentially, a clearer definition of what it is and what skills students need in order to be proficient at it would also be helpful.

We work with educational consultants on everything we do. Our workshops, our online content and our social content does have teacher input, if you like, to make sure there are clear learning outcomes. But it does not align to the national curriculum because I do not think that the framework is there as yet.

Lord Mitchell: Would you like to comment?

Patricia Hidalgo: What I was going to say is that this is not currently aligned to any national curriculum, and there is not a necessity for teachers to even impart media literacy. They have so many other things to do that, for them to have to diverge and start using our resources to

bring it into schools, is just too much to ask of them. I did say the last time we met that it would be important that you advise government to put it not just as a, "Do it if you want to" but almost a requirement that teachers impart media literacy in schools. Then we can be there to support that.

I think that the BBC is uniquely placed to do this. First of all, we are a media company. We are a public service media company. We are impartial; we are trusted. We have education. We have education experts. We have news experts. We have "Newsround" that understands how to speak to children. If you combine all those things, we could be creating a powerful, well thought through and trusted media literacy course that could be imparted in schools. If we do not make it compulsory for teachers to do that, it just will not happen.

Lord Mitchell: Would you like to see us recommend that?

Patricia Hidalgo: I would, yes.

Lindsay McCoy: As Patricia says, with the expertise for children and how you work with teachers and develop lesson plans, we stand ready to help. We will do it in any way we can and bring the expertise that we have in our team around disinformation and social media literacy. We will support anything that goes on in that area.

Q196 **Lord Mitchell:** Can we come on to some numbers please? How many schools, teachers and young people are reached by each of your initiatives, both online and in person, to the nearest thousand?

Cerys Griffiths: That will be very difficult to say. You put the resources on the website and, because it is not signed in, you do not know who is using them. As I said, on average 48,000 unique visitors a week come to our "Other Side of the Story" content, but it could be students or teachers using them in the classroom.

Lord Mitchell: Is that going up? Do you have a sense?

Cerys Griffiths: That has gone up 19% year on year, so that is an indication that we are probably getting better at how we tell the media literacy story for that age group. I also think that it indicates people are taking the issue more seriously.

For primary schools, we reached 750,000 primary-aged children through our Safer Internet Day "Live Lesson" this year, which was about online scams and particularly related to the gaming world. It is very important for that age group. We had 117,000 unique visits to our primary teacher offer since we launched it in January. Again, those are big numbers if you think about it. It is a teacher using it with a classroom.

We think that we have a pretty good reach, but we could reach more. The whole point that Patricia has made is that it is not a priority; teachers are using this material fairly reactively at the moment. If it was a priority and embedded, I think that our reach would be much greater.

Lindsay McCoy: I guess we are new entrants to the media literacy thing, but BBC Verify gets 2 million unique weekly visitors to the articles

on its website. We deliver to platforms right across the BBC, from the news channel to TV news bulletins and social media—so we are reaching people through that.

In terms of the actual media literacy, we will start running some Verify in-person workshops, which will be similar in scale and learning some of the lessons from Cerys's team, getting to a couple of hundred kids and livestreaming to local schools around the area as well.

Patricia Hidalgo: If we look at our reach with "Newsround" we have more than 3.5 million children watching "Newsround" every week. We do speak to them about what is happening in the world and fake news. We try to make sure that they know what is real and what is not. That is a continuous touchpoint for them.

Bitesize has grown in the past year as well. We are now reaching over 2 million children during term time with Bitesize every week, which is a very good number. We are looking at enhancing that offer. We did announce a couple of years ago that we were going to invest in Bitesize much more, making it a more personalised and adaptive platform to every child's needs and ways of learning. That is called adaptive learning, of course. That is something that we are beginning to roll out in the next year.

We hope that by doing this—by enhancing the way that we are imparting education and revision for children and making it so adaptive to everyone—our growth will go from this 2 million to 4 million in the next two years.

- Q197 **The Chair:** Could I just interrupt there? I will come back to you, Parry. In terms of your point, I wanted to clarify what you need to be able to reach more schools. Is it the schools not making it a priority or it not being a priority in the curriculum? Is it just that or is there anything else that would help you to improve your reach?

Cerys Griffiths: I think that we already have a good reach with schools. We had a site that was called BBC Teachers, now Bitesize for Teachers, on the same platform as our student content. That gets about 150,000 unique visitors a week. We have quite a broad reach, but it is not a subject that they would come to frequently. The most used stuff on there is English, maths and stuff like that that they use weekly.

The Chair: It is not sustained?

Cerys Griffiths: It is not sustained use. It is at the point of need, if you like. On a day like Safer Internet Day in primary schools there is a lot of focus on it, but in other parts of the year it is sporadic.

- Q198 **Lord Mitchell:** What resources or guidance are available specifically for parents and carers? How are they made accessible to this group?

Patricia Hidalgo: As I said at the beginning, CBeebies has become not just an entertainment brand but also a brand to support parents. We are launching a CBeebies parenting club and website in June. We hope that, by having support that comes not just from the early years

entertainment side of CBeebies but also the education, it will be very supportive for parents of children from birth all the way to when they enter school.

Then we basically hand over to Bitesize. When they are with CBeebies we are not talking to children; we are just talking to parents. When they graduate to Bitesize, we will talk to both children and parents at the same time and give the parents the support materials and content to help them navigate all the challenges that children face.

We launched a service called Parents' Toolkit during Covid. We did that in order to help parents understand what challenges they could be facing and to help to educate their children during lockdown when there was no school. It was so successful that we decided to continue investing in this content. Now we are making sure that we are super-sizing that, together with Bitesize and CBeebies.

Cerys Griffiths: There are a couple of other things we do. To Lindsay's point, there are lots of different ways of reaching an adult audience around fake news and disinformation. Some of the content that we create goes on the BBC home page, which is an adult-facing site.

For the last couple of years—we hope to continue—every year with "5 Live" we do the Bitesize teen survey. We ask teenagers a whole range of questions about their media use and the issues that they are facing in their lives. "5 Live" does programming around that which involves a lot of teenagers but is listened to by parents and adults. We are trying to reach them in lots of different ways using our own content.

Lindsay McCoy: We will have a section on the BBC Verify page as well with some of the literacy stuff: how do you escape your algorithm; how do you know what is fake? I think that will help people as well.

Patricia Hidalgo: You might also have heard our team say that we will be launching a family account. We are working out how that can be done, with making sure that there is an account for parents to be able to sign on to. When you want to have help from the BBC you can sign up to this account. It is specifically directed to parents with small and older children.

Q199 **Lord Dunlop:** I wanted to clarify something that you were saying, Patricia. You were talking about increasing the reach of BBC Bitesize. Is that the same as what Tim Davie was talking about—a personal learning companion for every child between seven and 16? If it is not, what is the stage of development of that idea? Has it been funded within the BBC?

Patricia Hidalgo: There are different parts to that. Currently, we are integrating adaptive learning within Bitesize in our BAU plans. We hope that by doing that—by making Bitesize much more accessible to all children's learning abilities—it will increase our reach and the use of Bitesize. That is one thing.

On top of that, in the past few months we have been piloting a gen AI assistant that will enhance the way that children are able to access

education and learn. Imagine if you bring together the whole of Bitesize content with "Newsround" and content from iPlayer into the learning experience, with sound, video and text, with gen AI being able to help you better understand the concepts and the things that you are trying to study, using all this richness of content that the BBC has. It is something we feel will be revolutionary. The way that this will be done, of course, is with all the rigour that the BBC has for safeguarding of children in any of its products. We will do it all like that.

This is not funded. This is something we are piloting at the moment. The pilot looks exciting. So far, if you know how gen AI can hallucinate, our pilot is hallucinating very little, almost none, because it is a language model that works on basically just the Bitesize content. It is not open. It is not open to interpretation. It is rigorously asking this gen AI—I am not very technical, sorry—to focus on just giving the answers that it can actually find, not to come up with its own things.

It has funny things like, for example, if the kid says, "I am bored. Talk to me about cakes" it will bring the child back to the subject. If it was about chemistry, it will say, "It is interesting that you are talking about cakes because making cakes is a chemical reaction". It will basically keep the child engaged in a way that we have never done before. Our hope is that by integrating AI into our Bitesize offer we will enhance the reach because people will want to use it.

Q200 Lord Dunlop: You have had the pilot. What is the timescale for taking a decision as to rolling this out more widely?

Patricia Hidalgo: We did the first pilot, and we are going now into user testing in the next three months. After that, we will need to refine and see where we are. I cannot give you that answer now because everything with technology is quite complicated. Our aim is to do this as soon as we can, as long as it is done safely and in the way that we need to do it. As soon as we can do it we will. Of course, again, this is not yet funded.

The Chair: Lord Knight also has a quick question here.

Q201 Lord Knight of Weymouth: I very much welcome that around the AI tool. This committee in a previous report was recommending BBC developing its own AI. Can you give me some reassurances around the data that children would input, how you manage the risk around children engaging with the AI in respect of their data and their privacy, and that that is held closed within the BBC environment and not shared back with the company that might have created the AI originally?

Patricia Hidalgo: That is how we work with all our digital products. We are very conscious that it is important to have that. Data safety for children is the most important thing, including making sure that they are safe, and they know that they are talking to a machine and not to a human. That is very important because we do know that children are now talking to ChatGPT as if it was their friend and believing everything

that this thing is saying to them. It is very important that they understand that they are talking to a machine and not to a person.

- Q202 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** That very much leads on to the area that I am keen to explore. Obviously, technology is changing all the time, and it is undoubtedly right that the BBC should be looking to use AI. However, do you fear that one of the effects will be that you end up doing much more individually with your customers, particularly children, losing any shared experience, which is what the BBC used to provide so that families talked about issues and subjects? Is what is happening now in the experiment you are talking about just going to cause further divisions, leaving children in their rooms talking to their machines more than before?

Patricia Hidalgo: I do not know that what we do will change the way that children are behaving or will behave in the future because we are not the only ones creating these chatbots. What we aim to do is to create a very safe chatbot that is trusted and fact-based and is not hallucinating or giving children the wrong answers. That is just one part of our offer. What we hope to do is to continue to deliver all the other great content that the BBC delivers, which brings people together.

- Q203 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** How will you ensure that the content that is generated by AI is accurate and not in the least harmful?

Patricia Hidalgo: That is how we program the gen AI, because everybody can decide what to tell that gen AI software to do and how to behave. That determines how safe it can be and how it has been thought through to be for a specific audience. Our target audience is children, so we are working very carefully to make sure that happens. We cannot say we will be successful, and if we are not successful, we will not launch this. We will only launch it if we are sure that this is very safe.

- Q204 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** Can you tell us how many people are working on the project?

Patricia Hidalgo: I know that there are two people who I interact with in terms of the communication, but I do not know exactly how many people technically are working on it at the moment. I could not tell you.

- Q205 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** One of the things that was quite surprising was the ambitions of BBC Verify and the level of people involved. You have a team of 60 journalists, and I think that the mission sounded admirable but somewhat ambitious for 60 people. Are you convinced that you have adequate staffing?

Lindsay McCoy: Part of the answer is around working with teams throughout BBC News. I have talked about it before when we are working on stories where people are reporting from elsewhere. Quite a lot of our work is collaborative. That is the team working with that. Then there is the stuff we do ourselves. We feel we have enough staff at the moment, but we want to increase our visibility. We want to increase our visibility on the website and on all sorts of different platforms. I would

always welcome more staff, but I think that I would be told no by my bosses.

The main thing is around collaboration and trying to work with people and maximise our output and our content and the stuff we can do. The mixture of staff within my team is massive as well—from data journalists to journalists who work with user-generated content, the open-source team and the disinformation team. It is lots of small teams that are brought together under one umbrella.

- Q206 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** There is a risk that we have found on the committee as our sessions have increased that media literacy is often interpreted as being aware of scams and being digitally capable. Cerys, a couple of the programmes that you mentioned were very much directed at doing that. Is there a very clear idea in the BBC of what media literacy is and what the three of you are trying to achieve?

Cerys Griffiths: I think that we probably have as clear an idea as anybody else. Scams is one issue. From a child's point of view it starts with digital literacy, understanding how tech works and what coding is and the impact it has, and then understanding now what gen AI is. We are doing an intervention in that area as well, which I can talk about. Then it becomes how you critically think about all the information you are fed online. That would be my broadest definition of it. Our aim is to give young people and adults as many skills as possible to be able to manage that information in an informed and intelligent way.

- Q207 **Baroness Wheatcroft:** I have one final question. You said earlier that, if we were going to make a recommendation in our report, it should be for a single media literacy content in the school curriculum. However, others have given us evidence suggesting that it should be embedded as critical thinking throughout the school curriculum. I wonder which you think would be the most effective.

Patricia Hidalgo: Critical thinking should be embedded in the whole curriculum, but that is not media literacy. Media literacy is so many more things, starting, as Cerys was saying, with understanding technology, understanding AI, and understanding how your behaviour will affect others on social media. There are so many different things. There is enough there to create a media literacy course.

The media literacy course cannot be something you make and then it just stays there. You could do a course for maths, and it can stay there for years; it does not really change that much. You cannot do that with media literacy because the posts will move every single year, every three months or six months. That is why I think that it is important that it is created specifically to do that, so that you can make it current continuously.

That is why I was saying that, with the combination of BBC Bitesize with BBC News and "Newsround", we can continue to monitor and see what is happening in the world and we can adapt that media literacy course to be current and relevant. Kids can be at school, thinking about whether

this is fake or not, with real news in front of them. That is what is important—to make sure it is imparted in a way that means it can be continuously evolving.

Q208 Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge: I have a quick final question. On the Bitesize chatbot, when children begin to interact with it, are they taught how to prompt it? Are they taught that they will be seeing different things than a child who is talking to it about maths and a child talking to it about French? Are they given that grounding to understand what is going on with the algorithms behind the model?

Patricia Hidalgo: Do you mean with gen AI?

Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge: The one you are about to launch.

Patricia Hidalgo: We have not started yet.

Cerys Griffiths: We are not going to launch it yet.

Patricia Hidalgo: The user testing will teach us a lot of things and we will iterate. We will, of course, have a course to introduce children to how to use it, but we do not know yet because we have not given it to them. We do not know how they will react to it. That will also teach us how to make it safe, because children will work out how to break the system. They are always trying to work out how to break the system, so we need this pilot and this user testing.

Cerys Griffiths: The stage we are at is we are in the discovery phase. We have a small prototype that is very impressive, but it is a small prototype. We are just in the discovery phase now and there will be an onboarding process for any child who uses it, should we launch it.

Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge: One of the themes that came up during our discussion with the Youth Parliament was how much they valued being taught how to prompt at an early age.

Cerys Griffiths: This autumn we are launching the Bitesize guide to gen AI. That is aimed at teenagers again and it is explaining what gen AI is and how you can effectively use it for good, with some inspiration about how you might want to use it in your career or your everyday life. It is partly "Here are the lookouts around gen AI" and "Here is how to use it".

We hope to work with external partners so that we give young people experience in using prompts accurately to create things with a purpose as well. We are aware that there is almost a stage before we launch our companion, if we do launch our companion, that is about teaching young people how to use gen AI effectively.

Q209 The Chair: Finally, we have touched on questions around the curriculum and that is helpful, but you are uniquely positioned to support media literacy, particularly for children. Is there anything that you can add that would indicate what further support you would need from government, from regulators or from others to help you fulfil that potential? You have that potential; what do you need? Apart from the curriculum, which we have touched on quite a bit, what else could government, regulators and

others do?

Cerys Griffiths: Resource and working in collaboration. It does need to be a solution that everybody gets behind: tech companies, other partners, and the education world. On resource, as Patricia said, it is not something you can create and then sit back. You have to renew it. You have to constantly be on the case, not just because technology changes but young people change constantly, and you have to run to keep up with them. That is resource heavy.

One of the most powerful tools we have is that face to face contact. In the survey that we do after we have done the workshops with students, all the figures are over 90% for children having a better understanding of balance and bias, and a better understanding of checking sources—all those are key skills. That is one of the most impactful ways, but again it is very resource heavy. With BBC News, we are making inroads in that area, but it is small scale at the moment.

Lindsay McCoy: A secure financial footing is probably the biggest ask. We are here, we are the experts in it, and we really want to do it. But we need the money and the resource and the certainty of that behind it.

Patricia Hidalgo: I will not say any more because they have already said it. We need financing and resources.

The Chair: That is good to know. Thank you very much indeed.