

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Curriculum and Assessment Review](#),
HC 864

Tuesday 17 June 2025

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Members present: Helen Hayes (Chair); Jess Asato; Mrs Sureena Brackenridge; Amanda Martin; Darren Paffey; Manuela Perteghella; Mark Swards.

Questions 230 - 256

Witnesses

I: Sean Harris, Director of People, Learning and Community Engagement (PLACE), Tees Valley Education; Dr Shabna Begum, CEO, The Runnymede Trust; and Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair, Religious Education Council for England and Wales.

II: Professor David Lundie, Professor of Education (School of Social & Environmental Sustainability), University of Glasgow; Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Assistant Professor in Digital Media and Communications, Department of Linguistics and Communication, University of Birmingham; Andrew Ettinger, Director of Education, The National Literacy Trust; and Professor Candice Satchwell, Professor of Literacies and Education, The University of Central Lancashire.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sean Harris, Dr Shabna Begum and Sarah Lane Cawte.

Q230 **Chair:** Can I welcome members and witnesses to our oral evidence session of the Education Select Committee this morning? This is an evidence session on the Curriculum and Assessment Review. I would like to start by asking our first panel of witnesses to introduce themselves to us. I will start with Sara Lane Cawte.

Sara Lane Cawte: Hello. I am Sara Lane Cawte. I am Chair of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales. The Religious Education Council was formed 52 years ago and is a member organisation with members from faith groups, higher education, research institutions, teaching and advisory services including the Church of England, the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, and the Network



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of Sikh Organisations. We have about 60 members so I will not go through all of them. Thank you very much for the invitation to come to speak today.

Sean Harris: Good morning, colleagues. Sean Harris from Tees Valley Education Trust. I am Director of PLACE, which is People, Learning and Community Engagement. We are a multi-academy trust serving the ever-brilliant Tees Valley in the north of England and I am also a researcher looking at child poverty through co-production with children and young people at Teesside University.

Dr Begum: Good morning. My name is Shabna Begum. I am Chief Executive of the Runnymede Trust, which is a racial justice think-tank and charity. We work across all areas of racial justice including wealth, health, and policing but our core work right from the very beginning in 1968 has always been around education. I was a teacher for 23 years before I came to the Runnymede Trust and I am also a mum to two teenage children, one of whom is sitting her final GCSE exam this morning.

Q231 **Chair:** Best of luck to her.

I will start our questioning this morning. How important is the curriculum compared with other factors in improving the educational attainment of disadvantaged groups of children? I will start with Sean Harris.

Sean Harris: It is a huge lever for change, a real lever for change in the lived and living reality, particularly for those children and young people for whom we know hardship is an enormous barrier. If I could take a moment to reflect on the fact that in education we know that we have at times an overemphasis on free school meals and the pupil premium as a proxy. The reality tells us that that dataset alone is only one small component part of that hardship picture. To give an example in the north-east we know that two-thirds of the region's constituencies have a child poverty level above 35%. That is enormous. As a trust, we do not talk about curriculum making a difference to just the lived reality of children but the living reality for children as well. Of course that comes with some complexities and I appreciate we will reflect on those a little bit later in the Committee meeting. What it does is give children that opportunity. Curriculum can present equitable opportunity if delivered and designed with poverty in mind.

As a trust, we do not talk about the fact that our curriculum raises aspiration. Of course, the reality is that for some children it absolutely will, but we challenge the rhetoric in our curriculum that somehow it is simply about raising aspiration. The families in Teesside that we serve, the communities that we serve, and the children that make up our schools, are in so many ways incredibly aspirant, but the opportunity is lacking at times because of structural inequalities that exist. Curriculum has the opportunity to break those down but of course that must be delivered and designed with poverty and that living reality in mind.



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The other thing I would say on curriculum at this point is the fact that we know that the statistical evidence is loud and clear for a child that leaves school with good outcomes, and I mean good outcomes in the broader sense so not just GCSE results, not just SAT results, but those broader outcomes in terms of health, for example, a basic standard of reading, and I know we will hear from the National Literacy Trust in a moment as well. My point is that a child must leave with good qualifications if they are to have the opportunity for a credible, impactful difference made to their life. It presents an opportunity to escape from the living reality of hardship.

Dr Begum: From our perspective, the curriculum is incredibly important and I think there is a real overlap and intersection between class and race and we know that the poverty statistics that Sean referred to are often compounded by race and ethnicity. As we know children of colour are much more likely to experience poverty, and that is geographically differentiated of course, but I think that the curriculum in terms of providing the knowledge framework that we have of who we are as a society and a community is incredibly important. The research that we have done has shown that there are quite significant gaps in the so-called knowledge-rich curriculum that we aspire to provide for our young children. I think that has quite a significant impact on children of colour in the classroom, but it has that much wider role in terms of providing that social glue. We know that education is described as a collective investment in our children and young people. Right now, that collective investment is definitely not one that enables us to have a full understanding of the kind of society that we are.

If I can share with you some statistics around where those gaps are, we have done some work on English GCSE for example and we know that 0.7% of students will have studied a writer of colour. This was a partnership that we did with Penguin, the publishers, who we are involved with in an ongoing partnership, and that has then expanded to include exam boards who are working to try to challenge that level of exposure to writers of colour. In the work that we have done on Our Migration Story, which I know you have been a champion of, 15 years' worth of work, we know that only 4% of GCSE history students will have studied anything on migration in Britain. We more recently did a report on art education and we found that only 2.4% of artists represented in the GCSE exam specification are from black and south Asian backgrounds. What we have is a curriculum that totally erases and ignores the contributions of people of colour in this country, both historically and currently. We know that had huge impacts in terms of the wider benefits that Sean implied there around belonging and empathy.

The curriculum currently is definitely inadequate in terms of addressing the full diversity of the nation that we are and I think that has a direct impact both in terms of engagement and relatability. I am sure that some colleagues here will have encountered some of the statistics around how low levels of engagement and relatability are in schools and children and young people, but more widely we know that the benefits of belonging



and empathy are critical to creating the social glue that we have referred to and creating positive benefits for those individual students.

Sara Lane Cawte: I am going to talk more about the importance of the curriculum in a moment, but without accountability the curriculum can be fantastic but not really serve the students. I would like to position accountability at the top of my list. A well-constructed curriculum, and I will talk particularly about religious education because that is the area I know most about, is inclusive, and the moves to create a more relevant curriculum have helped us to reflect the lived experience of a really diverse range of groups that are present in global Britain. If young people can identify with what is being taught, if they can see themselves in the subject matter, that helps them grow in confidence and then they can gain the skills to integrate, to contribute and their life experience really matters. That is a real problem with some young people. If they are disadvantaged, if they are from minority groups, they can feel, "This is not me" but if they are reflected in the curriculum it brings them in.

There is some evidence now, and we cannot say whether it is causative or it is a correlation, to suggest that performance improves when young people are given that real stimulus in the curriculum. We do know there are problems however good the curriculum is, though. We do not have sufficient teachers in religious education and 51% of teachers teaching religious education spend most of their time teaching other subjects. From the recent survey of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, we know that around 50% of lessons in primary schools are taught by non-teaching staff. The curriculum is really important but without the accountability and the teaching staff to deliver it it is going to be limited in its effectiveness.

Q232 **Chair:** Tell me about the assessment system. What features of the assessment system particularly affect children living with different types of disadvantage and affect their attainment as compared with their peers and what would you propose to address that?

Sean Harris: We see lots of well-intentioned areas of the curriculum that at times fall into the trap of an assumption of a child's starting point rather than an assessment. For example, in my own experience as a teacher, we have seen exam papers. There was one infamous example where, as part of creative writing, GCSE students were told for a stimulus, "I step off the tube at Piccadilly Circus. What is it I see?" and the children described trapeze artists, they talked about elephants, they talked about circus tops. Why? Because they had not had that exposure. They did not understand what that meant. I can think of another example not that long ago in SATs for example where children were encouraged to read a piece of evidence for reading that talked about how they could attract bats to the garden. Now, again, if you have a garden, if you are not surrounded by a concrete jungle, that is more accessible. That is so much more equitable. I am not suggesting that every single part of the curriculum is to be diluted or reframed, nor am I suggesting that the curriculum should be diluted full stop, but what I am suggesting is that it



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is important that the living reality of hardship is understood by those that frame both assessment frameworks and curriculum content.

Other ways in which we know it can impact, for many of our children in the Tees Valley I have talked about it not being about aspiration but about opportunity. For example, we know that a huge proportion of our families in the Tees Valley that we serve are in work-constrained poverty. The majority of families caught by, for example, the two-child benefit cap, 59% in the north-east, are in work. This idea that curriculum should just inspire a child to get into the workplace or should inspire the family to go and get work, we challenge that rhetoric.

As Katrina Morley, our CEO and my coauthor and friend says, "If a child cannot see it, it is really hard to be it." It is one of the reasons why, for example, we have the classroom-to-careers curriculum pathway for our children. This is co-constructed with local industries in Teesside where we give children an opportunity to have a meaningful encounter with industry in their context. Why? Because if a child can understand that PD Ports and AV Dawson and Casper Shipping and the like exist on their doorstep, that opportunity is made clear and so much more possible, not only for the child but for the family as well.

Finally, about that impact, we know that it can make curriculum and knowledge far more complex for those with less. I will give an example of the work that we are doing with the SHINE charity. Through generous funding we have been able to look at the whole concept of misconceptions that can occur for a child that is in hardship. Misconceptions occur not because every child in poverty does not have knowledge, but for some of those children in hardship we know that that is a genuine issue. I will give an example of one of our children in a year 4 lesson who said, when tasked with, "What might be the challenges of living in a coastal town?"—for context, Dormanstown Primary serves an area of significant inequality and we are about one mile away from Redcar Beach up in North Yorkshire—the child said, "A coconut might fall on your head." No malice is intended, it is not meant to be comical, but that child had a mental model of the coast and we had made an assumption that because they lived so near to the coast they would understand exactly what a beach is. So because of that work with SHINE we are spending a long time with children looking at misconceptions that can occur and I will say more about that as the Committee meeting develops.

Dr Begum: I guess my thoughts are less around the assessment format and more around the value of assessments and how they tend to focus on how schools function and operate and how they prioritise the work that they do. Certainly from our perspective and from what we know from the academic research, there is a narrowing of the curriculum increasingly where the GCSE options are now beginning to be taught in year 9 so that children and young people lose that key stage 3 time, which is that more broad and balanced knowledge—deficient as well—but certainly that broad balanced curriculum that is available to all students



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at key stage 3 is increasingly lost by schools that have decided to extend the GCSE time to a three-year timetable and to try to boost results through that. I think that is a product of the marketisation of the system, the league tables, that encourages schools to think about their public performance rather than the welfare and benefit of children and young people. That I think is something we do need to address.

The other thing that the assessment structure does is that there is setting and streaming that happens to children and young people through their GCSEs, and we know certainly from the research that is done that that often means that children and young people from black and minority ethnic communities are put into lower sets because teachers have lower expectations, they underestimate the academic potential and abilities of students. That is not just in the UK. We have seen that across the board, across all OECD countries in terms of the research showing that significant underestimation of where students should be placed in terms of setting and streaming and we know that has lifelong consequences. If you are entered into a foundation paper, you are limited to the grade that you can achieve in that particular paper. We know that racially biased teacher expectations can have quite significant impacts on children and young people and they are motivated by teachers wanting to ensure that students do not underperform and the school does not lose the performance standards that they are publicly accountable for.

Also, there is also considerable evidence about schools off-rolling children and young people right before their GCSEs again to avoid students that they think might underperform or might lower their overall value-added score, their progress 8 scores, off-rolling those children or putting them into alternative provision. That again has racially disproportionate patterns to that as well. I am less concerned about the curriculum structure but I am more concerned by the perverse incentives that encourages schools to operate with, which do not centre the welfare, benefit and performance of children and young people but is about the school's public performance.

Sara Lane Cawte: I liked what Sean said about if a child cannot see it, it is hard to be it. I think that reiterates the point I was making about the importance of a curriculum that reflects young people's lived experience. One of the problems we have with assessment in religious education is that by the end of key stage 3 children are coming from different places, different starting points because we have a different curriculum for every school. We have locally agreed syllabuses so they will have had a very varied experience depending on where they live and what they have been taught up until then. Depending on how good the curriculum is up to that point will have an impact on their later performance.

Performance measures are a real problem in this. Religious education has been disproportionately disadvantaged by not being included in the Ebacc, in performance 8, and it has meant that the short course for GCSE, which was very popular and very popular with schools with high proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, has declined in



numbers because it does not count for anything. It counts for the students but it does not count for the school performance measures. We would like to see that position changed. It is a valuable qualification for those who do not opt for the full GCSE in religious studies.

There is also the issue of the prior cultural capital of young people. If they have been in a situation where they have been on lots of visits to places of worship and interest they are going to have a real advantage in accessing some of the content of GCSE particularly. I think the structure of the GCSEs is very content heavy but it has been a bit left behind by developments in the subject. There is a focus on institutional knowledge about religions as if they are in siloes and sometimes they are almost pitched against each other. For example, some questions require you to provide counterarguments. These sometimes move into things such as, "All Christians believe this and all Muslims believe this" when the situation is a lot more fluid. The construction of curriculum influences the assessment but also the way that assessment counts in different subjects is disadvantageous to those students who have not had all the advantages of family and the schools that have been able to give them those experiences.

Q233 Mark Sowards: My question is for Sean. You have already answered this in part with your first two answers but please can you tell us, and you do not need to repeat any of the information you have given so far, about your work in Tees Valley to develop a curriculum that takes into account those challenges that are faced by low-income families? Is there more that you can share about that?

Sean Harris: Absolutely. Thank you, Mark and I will do my best not to repeat myself. I think I would start with framing: poverty and hardship is at the forefront of our work. As a multi-academy trust, we see ourselves not merely as curriculum givers or curriculum architects but as civil architects, and I think that nuance is important. It is something that our staff now fiercely believe and when you visit—and please do come to visit, colleagues—we would like to share more of that with you. When you then start to understand how to design and deliver curriculum with poverty in mind it is a real gamechanger. It is a gamechanger because what it does is make you purposefully understand local hardship data, so we are furiously curious about finding what the day-to-day lived and living reality is for families and we know we are not going to get this from free school meal data, for example, pupil premium data. It is why we work with the likes of the North East Child Poverty Commission, charities such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and other hyperlocal charities to understand the ecosystem in which the curriculum is designed and delivered.

By definition, we invite others to contribute to that curriculum process with us—children, and families—and I will share more on that in a moment. We talked about industries and how they influence not only the direction of the curriculum at times but also the hyperlocal concepts that we expose children to. With the greatest of respect, we might have been in education for 30 or 40 years but trying to explain what a chemical



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engineer does on the River Tees, for those of us who have not been one, is pretty difficult. The flip side is also true. You might be a great chemical engineer but to try to explain it to a six-year-old can be quite tricky as well.

Some of the other principles that have driven how we have delivered that, we plan very deliberately and intentionally with place in mind. You will notice throughout our curriculum there are notable mentions of other civil architects, landmarks, icons, people, places that we know will forge a connection for our children and families, very much like Dr Shabna shared a moment ago, because it gives people that sense of belonging. It gives people that sense of locality. We are also aware that, while the statistics on child poverty are significant in the Tees Valley, it is an area built on pioneers and industrialists. It has a rich history in terms of that and you will see that littered throughout our history curriculum.

I talked briefly about classroom to careers, but to give another example of how those meaningful encounters forge both classroom learning and beyond classroom learning, let me give the example of year 6 recently who, working with PD Ports and AV Dawson, researched what it would take for the River Tees to be more sustainable, then presented their ideas to industry experts locally and they were scribbling notes, they were taking notes from our children on how to make their businesses more ethical. What is very interesting as teachers is that we made an assumption that they would use papier mâché models to display their work. Some children used Minecraft, for example, and digital agency to present their ideas, so we are very intentional about building in some autonomy for the children to be able to draw on their own experience as part of that as well.

The other way in which we have constructed that marker is through our work with SHINE, which I briefly touched on. The misconceptions work was borne out of teachers regularly coming up in classrooms against misconception, sometimes unintentionally from children. I shared the coconut story, and another one that triggered that was we had prepared some information on religious education and the question that was asked to children was, "What might be the challenges of living as a British Muslim in the modern world?" For some of our children, the concept of British and Muslim needed some deliberate airtime in itself in the curriculum before we could even get to those challenges. That project was borne from the idea that it is really easy for us as teachers to exist in a silo and with the curse of knowledge plan what we think children need, but at what point do we create intentional opportunities for children to feed into that and say, "This is what I already know" or, "This is what my friends with less might tell you about that"? We do that very sensitively. Some of our children talk about Timmy in the Tees or Tess in the Tees as a fictional character who has less than them. We take that misconception analysis from children and feed that into lesson planning and delivery as well. What is happening there is teachers are regularly thinking about what might be the clear and sometimes implicit obstacles that a child might face because of hardship in the Tees Valley.



The final thing I will share in terms of how we have also created that around the nuance of places is listening to families and families feeding into that curriculum. What we are not proposing here is somehow we give the curriculum over to families in its entirety and ask them to map it for us, but families and children have such a valuable role to play in that. To give an example from one of our schools, for World Book Day, Brambles Primary wanted to understand how they could frame some extracurricular celebrations of reading in a more appropriate way for families. The feedback from children and families was that there is pressure to dress up on those days, to access additional costumes or somehow celebrate what you might not have in the home environment in some cases. Working with families, the head teacher, Stuart Mayle, designed it so that all children would be given a white, plain T-shirt that would be designed as part of the design technology curriculum programme, total cost £475. Children wore those T-shirts displaying the books they had celebrated on World Book Day and celebrated their work together. In doing so we completely removed the additional costs and barriers to learning that we know are amplified for those children and families in hardship. Those are just some examples of how we do that.

Q234 Mark Swards: That is very helpful and answers one of my follow-ups, which is about what work you have done with families and children to understand where they are so you can design your curriculum. My only other question is you mentioned outcomes before, you talked about the importance of GCSE results, and I think you mentioned health outcomes. How are you measuring it? What have the outcomes been as a result of this work?

Sean Harris: An excellent question. It is still very much a work in progress, Mark. I would not want to profess that somehow we have reached a sweet spot on this. What we find is that as a trust the more we talk about having no egos and no siloes when it comes to curriculum development and our wider offer to families the better. We work quite closely in partnership with Teesside University, for example, the Child of the North, where we featured in those reports and have co-constructed some of those reports. One of the things that we recognise is that schools now need more expertise than they have ever had but the reality is that we do not have that expertise in-house and so we need to be prepared to talk with others about it.

In terms of that impact data, if we were just using an orthodox measure in terms of school outcomes on attendance, our attendance is at or above the national average. We know there are a multitude of things that feed into that, including curriculum but that is one of those measures. Other measures, for example, include families being able to access work that is not just in-work poverty. That is something that we are working with local industries to chart over the next few years, looking at the number of children, not only in our schools but in other schools, that have access to meaningful encounters with industry and who as a result would say they now know where to access that, they now know where to go to find out about that work.



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On health inequalities, we did some work for example with Teesside University where children looked at the concept of graphic medicine and they looked at how you make medicine locally more equitable for families. That was done with some of our children as well in Discovery Special Academy who have profound learning needs and in some cases life-limiting illnesses as well. Okay, I cannot tell you that it has somehow brought down the health inequality in Teesside but what I can tell you is it means that our trust is working more closely than ever with health professionals in the area, feeding into reports nationally that show what Teesside as a local place-based offer means as well, and more recently has attracted over £250,000 just for Tees Valley Education but also other partners through, for example the National Lottery Community Fund, to tackle inequalities at scale.

Q235 Mark Swards: It sounds to me that the GCSE results are the main measure so far and that you are developing other ways to measure your impact. Is that true?

Sean Harris: From our predominantly primary perspective I think the thing to remember there is that we have multiple pathways in terms of our formal pathways, for example, SATs results, to put it crudely, and informal and semi-formal plus curriculum pathways as well. It is a measure but what I want to stress is that we recognise that is one component part of what a fullness of life means to a child at the end of that process.

Chair: I am going to encourage you all to be a little bit more succinct in your answers because we have a lot of topics that we want to ask you about and we will not get to all of them if we have answers that are as long as we have had. I accept there is a lot to say about this subject but if we can be briefer that would be helpful. I am going to go to Darren next.

Q236 Darren Paffey: Good morning. My question is also for Sean Harris. The Curriculum and Assessment Review includes a focus on employability. Could you talk a bit about how Tees Valley's work with employers has helped to ensure that young people, school leavers, understand what the opportunities are for them locally and how they then attain those opportunities?

Sean Harris: Absolutely. Again, our context is predominantly primary so what we recognise is that that work needs to follow through with our secondary colleagues. Fortunately, we have just had a big boost from the National Lottery as I talked about a moment ago to further that work and organisations like the Rank Foundation. As a result of those meaningful encounters with industry, children are telling us, "I now understand what local opportunities exist" but we would challenge the idea that somehow we are capping our ambition to stay in the Tees Valley. What children are also telling us is, "If I were to get a role with the likes of PD Ports or AV Dawson, they have global international links so I could have a hyperlocal investment here in Teesside, but I could also be on the other side of the world." That is filtering through to families as well. Families and children



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co-construct our Tees Valley Education magazine, where regularly we feature children interviewing, for example, industry experts locally and the type of opportunities that exist as well.

In the interests of keeping this succinct, taking on the Chair's challenge, what I would say is we see that for our children locally that does something else, which is that it comes back into school and it gives them a further appetite for learning. We see evidence of that in the fact that for example our outcome measures, to come back to Mark Swards' point about the value of those, are at or way above the national average for all our children, including for those who have profound special educational needs.

Q237 Darren Paffey: If the review were to take one thing from that to apply nationally to make the biggest impact change, what would you say that is?

Sean Harris: I would say that it would be welcomed and we would invite a conversation about how we use our classroom to careers model with our industry partners in Teesside to form similar ventures in other areas, particularly around maritime clusters, for example, to ensure that schools and industry experts locally can co-construct a curriculum that delivers equity for families and children in their nuances of place.

Dr Begum: Very quickly, not from the same perspective, but one of the things that we found in terms of that link between school and performance and then employability is the depletion of a careers advice service within schools and how that has fundamentally impacted students from working-class backgrounds, but also students of colour, who rely on those kinds of networks to provide them with the advice they need in terms of routes into employment, the subject choices that they need to make at both A-level and further on. I think that has been something that we found across the different subjects and does make a significant impact. For example, our report on art education found that students of colour do take art GCSE and they take it at higher numbers at GCSE but the drop-off happens when they go through to A-level and then undergraduate because they do not know how to access careers in the cultural sector. That gap I think is something we need to be aware of.

Q238 Mrs Brackenridge: A follow-up question picking up a very important point that Dr Begum made and the really good work that is going on at Tees Valley Education. I am going to go to the decimation of careers. Good advice, guidance and real work experience opportunities. My question to Sean is in terms of the practicalities: how have you been able to achieve this at Tees Valley considering the different levels of your local employers, and local authorities, and is there anything through the Curriculum and Assessment Review that we can learn at a national level?

Sean Harris: An excellent question. I think there are a few bits there. The trust has been around for 10 years and this is something we have been doing throughout that 10-year period. While we are certainly seeing much riper fruit on this work now, this is something that we have been



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doing for some time, particularly spearheaded by Katrina Morley, our CEO. One of the things that supported us was doing a problem analysis of what inequality meant. The reason I share that is because it moved our conversation in curriculum from being a point of assumption to a point of assessment, working with local industry leaders around the table to say, "So these are the issues. These are the barriers. Where might you have a role to play in helping us understand that?"

We talk in the trust about ganging up on the problem, not on each other. It is really easy to say, "Well, those industries need to do more than that. Public health needs to do more. The local authority needs to do this" but what it needed was some very deliberate, intentional roundtable time together as curriculum and civil architects to say, "Well, what do we want for our children? What does that mean for us? How do we do that for our children?" What that then led to was us mapping the core concepts that we think a child needs, but testing that with families, testing that with children and local industry as well and then looking at how we, pardon the pun, anchor that in place in an area such as Teesside, which has a huge maritime focus.

The River Tees was something that not only children said to us, because to quote one of our children, "It runs through where we live" but with industry leaders as well to ask what are the industries a person can do on the River Tees? From that, working then with industries in terms of, "So this is what we will do in the classroom." How can you bring that to life in a way that is more than—not to knock the schools that do this, but it has to be more than a careers fair, it has to be more than a child leaving with a goodie bag filled with lots of stationery from that employer by the end of the day. What our children get is a dignified, meaningful encounter with those industries that has been genuinely co-constructed with those industry leaders. For us that has been significant.

The additional fiscal resource from organisations such as the Rank Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund is helpful. Putting children on a coach in this day and age costs a significant amount of money to schools that are trying to stay warm.

Q239 Manuela Perteghella: You have all talked about the difference that the Curriculum and Assessment Review will make to the outcomes of the most disadvantaged children in England's schools. What further changes to the curriculum and assessment need to be made to achieve this?

Dr Begum: We see a clear need in terms of the knowledge gap that currently exists across the national curriculum, across GCSEs. Again, we aspire to a knowledge-rich curriculum but it is clearly deficient in meeting that aspiration. I think I have already said about the statistics around the lack of representation. We know the benefits of that and those are not just accrued to children of colour. We are talking about all students benefiting from an inclusive and representative curriculum.

I guess from our perspective we strongly believe that the recommendations that are suggested in the interim report from Professor



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Francis talk about the need for young people to see themselves represented in this curriculum, to see themselves as learners and for their whole selves to be represented in the curriculum. We would be very disappointed if that did not go on to a recommendation that talked about it being a statutory entitlement. Currently, there are options for teachers to be able to teach topics that might relate to migration and empire, or the cultural and other contributions of children of colour and communities of colour in the UK. However, we know that even where that option is available to teachers, there are barriers—mostly time, sometimes money and resources but also teacher confidence and subject knowledge—that mean that teachers do not take those options up and schools avoid those topics. The option to teach the migration module at GCSE exists and has existed but only 4% of history students had studied it in 2019, which is the last time we recorded the ethnicity data.

We think that remaining in the current model where it is optional is not an option. We need to move to statutory entitlement. The national curriculum currently talks about statutory content and gives a brief description. We think that the description can move from just broad and balanced to broad, balanced and inclusive. By making that description the statutory requirement or the statutory entitlement, I think we are incentivising schools, we are incentivising teachers, we are incentivising ITE providers, CPD providers, educational publishers, the whole ecosystem to respond to that, but that has to come as the full recommendation that it is a statutory entitlement for all children and young people rather than an option because we know the optional system has not worked.

Sean Harris: We welcome the shift from high standards for some to ensuring excellence and accessibility for all. That for us is a real takeaway of that curriculum review. We really want to challenge that rhetoric that somehow we are going to reach a point here where the curriculum is not crammed or is not full. It is often what we say to our teachers, the curriculum is always going to be full, and it is always going to be crammed. What matters is the teachers having the autonomy to know because of their place-based context what might need to be amplified or perhaps dialled down because of the result of the barriers to learning that exist. I really do hope that that autonomy will be built into there.

We also challenge the rhetoric that somehow curriculum will ever be done. It is a bit like the teacher who says, "I am up to date with my teacher marking." You never are. It is always historic. From our perspective, there is never going to be a sweet spot where we say, "Right, that is curriculum done. Now let us crack on with something else." It should be iterative; it should be constantly reviewed. For example, the inequalities I have talked about in Teesside we know have been amplified in the last few years. Post-pandemic the landscape has shifted and our curriculum needs to because of it.

From our perspective, another key recommendation coming from that, which we hope will continue, is this idea that it is evolutionary, not



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revolutionary. I hope that schools in an individual place-based context will have further opportunities to feed into that.

Sara Lane Cawte: I would like to start with what we want students to get out of this. We asked our members what they wanted to see if they had a student who was well-educated in religious education. They said that pupil would be religiously and world-view literate, able to think critically, to engage empathetically with others and to reflect meaningfully on their own perspective. At the moment we have a situation, some of which I have explained, that we have a diverse range of quality in the syllabuses that are being provided to our schools. The religious education community is unanimous that the provision of religious education needs reform and to get such a diverse range of groups unanimous on something is quite an achievement. At a minimum, we would want the Religious Education Council's national content standard to be included in updated DfE guidance that Ofsted can inspect schools against. The last guidance was published 15 years ago and is out of date, and this all affects how the curriculum is delivered.

Many would argue that religious education should be in the national curriculum and have parity with other national curriculum subjects in terms of accountability, provision, quality of teaching and resourcing. We would also like GCSE and A-level to be updated to reflect the more exciting teaching that is going on further down the school in schools where children are given access to these new curricula that make contact with their own positions and challenge them to think about their positionality.

There is a growing consensus that religious education should be within the national curriculum to safeguard pupils' entitlement. We have data that says that one in six secondary schools are not providing religious education for year 11 students or may not be providing religious education for year 11 students. That is against the legal entitlement that those students have. There may be ways of safeguarding it by putting it into the national curriculum. The current system has failed and it has not secured what Parliament intends, which is a high-quality religious education for all pupils. Most providers of schools with a religious character would want to retain the right to determine their own religious education content within the curriculum, but we believe there are ways of accommodating that alongside a move to position religious education within the national curriculum. For us, a key thing is about where religious education sits and the parity with other subjects, particularly other humanities subjects.

Dr Begum: Adding very quickly to Sara's point about students, for us this is very much coming from children and young people, so 70% of young people who took part in our nationwide Lit in Colour survey said that they wanted to see a much more diverse curriculum. That rose to 77% for children of black, Asian and minority ethnic background. The work that we did on Visualise art education, 66% of secondary school students said that they too wanted to study a more diverse range of



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artists. This is echoed by teachers as well. This is really important that there is no resistance to this. Schools welcome this guidance and extra support, whether it is children, teachers, or exam boards that we have spoken to.

The exam boards that we have worked with both through the Lit in Colour project and Visualise have come on board, they have tried to diversify their specifications but they need that additional level of policy support and incentivisation as well. There is no resistance to this; this is something that I think schools, children and young people are demanding.

Chair: Again with encouragement for conciseness in your answers because otherwise we will not get through all the topics that we want to discuss, we will go to Jess Asato.

Q240 Jess Asato: The assessment review's interim report sets out the need for a curriculum that reflects the issues and adversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented. How confident are you that this will be achieved in practice?

Dr Begum: Again I think that the report is a really thoughtful one. The engagement that we have had with Professor Francis, and I know the significant representations that have been made both from the racial justice sector but more widely within the education community, have very much argued for this more representative and diverse curriculum. I am confident that the demand has been made clear to the panel. I think that the interim report suggests that they have listened to that.

I am not fully confident that we are going to move from that optional and encouraging more diverse options to what we think needs to happen, which I think universally across the racial justice sector, across education unions, for example, have all said that we need to move to a model of entitlement rather than options.

Going back to a previous point, if we stay in the space of increasing the diversity of options available to teachers, some schools will embrace that wholeheartedly, which is the current status quo, and others will feel that it is not relevant, or not important. Coming back to the wider point I was making, this is not a curriculum just for children of colour. We are not talking about the benefits being exclusive to minority ethnic children. We are talking about children in all-white communities who need to see the representation of the world, the society, and the nation that they live in. If we think back to the riots of last year and the slogans that were used of, "We want our country back" that showed a complete misunderstanding of what this country is and who we are. I think those kinds of things, the deep polarisation, the division that we have seen in society, we are not talking just about last year, we are talking about Ballymena and events of last week, those issues are related to the kind of social cohesion, how we project ourselves through the curriculum.



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Currently, the curriculum simply does not offer us an understanding of who we are, why we are the demographic that we are, whether you live in an all-white community in a rural area or whether you live in a very diverse city or Hackney where I taught for 19 years. While I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the report, I would like to see a recommendation that moves us to statutory entitlement.

Q241 Mrs Brackenridge: Picking up once again on the very insightful point that you made, Dr Begum, you spoke about the need for a diverse curriculum. I wish you well in answering this succinctly but what tools do teachers and schools need to achieve that?

Dr Begum: It is a fundamental question because across all our research whether it is Our Migration Story, which was with history teachers, Visualise, which was with GCSE art teachers, or English teachers through the Lit in Colour programme, every single research project has identified time, confidence, subject knowledge and resources. Those are the four key barriers that teachers face in terms of perhaps wanting to deliver a more diverse curriculum but finding those as the key challenges. We need to start with the subject knowledge. Teachers will only develop confidence if they are given subject knowledge through the Initial Teacher Education programme. We need the whole wraparound programme right from the very beginning of a teacher's journey. That needs to be reflected in the teacher standards so that there are expectations around subject knowledge but there also needs to be things to do with racial literacy.

One of the other things that we found is that teachers talk about their lack of confidence to talk about issues to do with race and racism and the low levels of literacy they have around these issues. Therefore instead of embracing or being curious about that or encouraging students to be curious about that, they revert to silence. That leaves a horrible vacuum for children and young people. There is the issue of money for resources. For the Lit in Colour programme one of the big barriers was set text. Teachers recycle the same "An Inspector Calls" set text because they have them. Investing in a new set text, investing in new resources is always costly but we have seen that achieved. We more recently had a Pioneers Project. We worked with Pearson, one of the biggest exam boards, through the Lit in Colour project. We alleviated through that project the resource barrier. We provided the resources to schools and what we saw was not only did students who were studying those set texts report increases in empathy but they also maintained their attainment standards. I think that we have the infrastructure that we need in terms of teachers, their confidence and the education and continuing professional development piece.

Sara Lane Cawte: Could I reiterate that we are encountering the same problems in religious education? Teacher supply is a major issue. For well-qualified teachers this year, it looks as though we are going to hit about 40% of the target for recruitment. In 13 out of the last 14 years, the target has been missed, so we have a cumulative deficit. We do not now have funding for subject knowledge enhancement courses. As you



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can see religious education is a key place for dealing with issues of diversity, and disadvantage and enabling young people to take their place in the world. These things are very important.

Q242 Manuela Perteghella: What will be the merits of making changes to the curricula for key stages 1, 2 and 3 which is to all pupils, compared to curricula for key stage 4 subjects, which only some students will choose to take?

Sara Lane Cawte: For us, it depends where you are, in which school and which agreed syllabus you are using in religious education. If we were to enable the national contents standard to be either statutory or in non-statutory guidance, we would have an assurance of a quality of education for students from those stages in religious education. At the moment the quality depends largely on funding because some local authorities can put in £100,000. One local authority put in £100,000 to its SACRE which is responsible for convening the committee that writes the syllabus. Others have nothing.

Q243 Chair: We do have some questions, if we get to them, specifically about the religious education syllabus. We are very interested in this question, so I might go to other witnesses. It is specifically about the differences between the stage 1 to 3 curriculum, which is taught to all students, and stage 4 where students have options and choices and where the balance of change within the Curriculum and Assessment Review should fall. I really do need to keep you focused on the questions that we have asked so that we can get to the ones that you might want to answer as well.

Sara Lane Cawte: I think the point I was making was that there is such diversity in religious education in key stages 1 to 3 that the difference would be more significant in those stages because then they have core exam syllabuses in key stages 4 and 5 if they are doing exam religious education.

Dr Begum: I can answer that very quickly. Yes, I think that key stage 1, 2 and 3 are the core curriculum, they have universal application, they absolutely should be the focus of the Curriculum and Assessment Review.

Sean Harris: If we use the example of the classroom to careers work we are doing, the earlier we start the better. I say that as someone who has predominantly taught in secondary schools my entire life and is now predominantly in a multi-academy trust that is primary: the earlier we start the better for every child, particularly those in hardship.

Q244 Darren Paffey: Ofsted reported last year that a high-quality religious education curriculum is not secure, it said, in too many schools. Why do you think that is and what do you think the review can do about that? What recommendations would you like to see?

Sara Lane Cawte: I think I have covered some of those points already but I will bring them together.

Darren Paffey: Just in case there is anything additional.



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Sara Lane Cawte: Yes. I think some of the issues are around accountability. Ofsted has reported this. They reported some of the same findings 10 years ago and clearly, nothing was put in place to improve the situation in those 10 years. In that time, we have a continuing deficit of well-qualified, well-trained teachers and we have a curriculum that varies depending on your postcode.

I would like to mention a little bit about that because we think that in law, it might be 152 different locally agreed syllabuses reflecting the number of local authorities, but there are not because we know that about 40% of schools are using the same bought-in syllabus. We are in a very strange position where one thing appears to be happening but in reality, a different thing is happening. We want quality assurance. We want the national content standard for religious education to improve the quality. That enables teachers to use the skills they already have but also to develop new skills to serve those children's needs.

We have a national plan for religious education that looks at a new vision for the subject, which is this inclusive subject that reflects the diversity of modern Britain and prepares students for life in that setting. We look at high-quality teaching and then investment in the workforce. All those things need a high-quality curriculum to give them that focus. I think this is a real opportunity for the subject. It is probably the best opportunity to secure high-quality religious education for all students that there has been for many years, for generations.

Darren Paffey: So the expectation is there and you are saying that if they lack a locally designed syllabus they can essentially buy one in—

Sara Lane Cawte: If they have the money.

Q245 **Darren Paffey:** So what are the barriers? What problems are schools facing in delivering religious education where it is not happening?

Sara Lane Cawte: The EBacc is a real disincentive to provide a broad and balanced curriculum at key stage 3, as has already been mentioned, because some GCSE courses are still starting at year 9 despite recommendations to the contrary. Because religious education does not feature in the performance measures and does not count in a progress 8 in the EBacc, some schools choose to focus on performance measures and ditch religious education because it does not add to their total, despite what it gives to the pupils. That is a real barrier for us and again I want to reiterate the lack of supply of highly qualified, well-trained teachers with secure subject knowledge. We are operating at a deficit there and that needs to be addressed. The bursary was one step forward with that.

Teachers move around a lot as well. If they were more confident that the curriculum would have some common points, even if there were local variations, that would also enable teachers to feel more inclined to move across county boundaries, which are in many ways artificial boundaries. We know that students themselves move around the country. One of my



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questions is always, "Will they recognise that it is the same subject if they move from one local authority to another where the curriculum looks so drastically different?"

- Q246 **Mark Swards:** Again to Sara, sticking with the religious education curriculum, what are the challenges associated with the way that religious education is dealt with by legislation? I have a specific example here but I thought I would ask you the open question first.

Sara Lane Cawte: I think the requirement for SACREs to form locally agreed syllabuses is probably the key problem that we are dealing with. As I have mentioned, the quality is not consistent and that partly depends on the funding that is made available. I mentioned that one local authority in the recent survey by the National Association of SACREs received a £100,000 budget. I was chair of a SACRE in a local authority where I was told, "You have no budget to revise your locally agreed syllabus." In the worst-case scenarios that means that they are forced to stick with syllabuses that have been around for years and have not kept up with the developments of the subject. Having some consistency particularly through standards, potentially through making religious education part of the national curriculum, would improve the lot of the subject and ultimately improve the experience and value for students.

- Q247 **Mark Swards:** Brilliant. Are there any strengths to having locally developed religious education curriculums?

Sara Lane Cawte: There are. SACREs themselves are a great treasure. They are brilliant places for building community cohesion because you bring people together from all different faith and belief backgrounds together with teachers and local authority. SACREs themselves we believe should be retained, because they can support the RE in schools and they can provide people who can speak about their lived experience, but they do need a bit more consistency in the resources that are offered. That is a real strength of local determination.

Also, as in the history and geography curriculum at the moment, having some scope for local study to look at where you live and what you have around you is important, because that values young people's experience and brings in the community. It builds links with the local community. We believe that is something that really strengthens RE provision.

Chair: Thank you very much. We are grateful to all of you for coming to give evidence today. We are particularly interested in examples of good practice for inclusive curriculum, whether that is on a subject-specific basis or whether that is on a whole-school basis. I know, Sean, that your organisation has written to us with some detail about what you provide, which is welcome.

Dr Begum and Sarah Lane Cawte, if there are specific examples of inclusive curriculum content that already exists that you think should be rolled out as part of the curriculum assessment review that you would like the committee to be aware of, please feel free to write to us after our session. Apologies that we were short on time. It is always the case at

the Committee. Thank you once again for coming this morning.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor David Lundie, Dr Gianfranco Polizzi, Andrew Ettinger and Professor Candice Satchwell.

Q248 **Chair:** Welcome back to the second panel of our oral evidence session on the curriculum assessment review. Can I welcome the witnesses for our second panel and ask you to introduce yourselves to us, starting with Professor Satchwell, please?

Professor Satchwell: I am Professor Candice Satchwell; I am from the University of Central Lancashire, where I am professor of literacies and education. I should say that the University of Central Lancashire is now the University of Lancashire, but it is the same place. I am also on the executive committee of the UK Literacy Association and I work a lot with children and young people about their priorities for the curriculum, and with teachers over many years. Most recently, I have been working on a media literacy project at my university with several colleagues.

Dr Polizzi: Gianfranco Polizzi here. I am an assistant professor in digital media communications at the University of Birmingham. My expertise is in digital literacy and media literacy-related concepts with a focus on the educational aspects that relate to the questions of formal and informal learning that apply to different groups and how those groups can develop the skills that they need in order to thrive in the digital age. My research also concerns very much what you then do with those skills—issues of participation, digital inclusion, social inclusion, and digital citizenship, and I have done work focusing both on children and adults.

Andrew Ettinger: I am Andrew Ettinger, director of education at the National Literacy Trust. We are a charity running for 30 years now, looking to raise literacy levels across the country to break down barriers to opportunity, particularly in the areas of high disadvantage. For the past decade, we have been advocating for a greater prioritisation of media literacy in the curriculum.

Professor Lundie: I am Professor David Lundie, from the University of Glasgow and I am currently the principal investigator on an ESRC project called “Teaching for Digital Citizenship: Data Ethics in the Classroom and Beyond”. It is a four nations project that seeks to understand the aims, the practices and the models of effectiveness in digital citizenship education.

Q249 **Chair:** Thank you very much. To start us off, the curriculum and assessment review discusses digital and media skills in the context of preparing young people to harness future opportunities and to fend off threats to our democracy and cohesion. What should media literacy education look like in our schools? I might start with Dr Polizzi.



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Dr Polizzi: Thanks, brilliant question. Traditionally, media literacy education sits between two paradigms—protectionism on the one hand and empowerment and participation. Ideally, you would want media literacy education to tap into those two elements. On the one hand, you equip children with a lifelong set of skills and knowledge that will allow them to protect themselves against online harms, with information being one of them but also threats like online abuse and privacy-related issues and so on. At the same time you also want them to develop the skills that will enable them to participate actively in this society. By participating, I mean not just civic and political engagement, which obviously is imperative for the functioning of our democracy, but also taking part in different areas of life.

My impression is that with recent threats, for example, the fake news phenomenon, there has been an emphasis on protection, which is absolutely important. This is not to say that that should be less emphasised in policy discourses, but the paradigm that relates to empowerment and participation is somehow lost. Two poles that are not mutually exclusive are critical thinking and creativity. We want children to develop those critical thinking skills that allow them to be critical and be safe when they are using the internet but at the same time to develop the creative skills that enable them to create content, share content and participate with others. Research has shown that those two sides of the coin can work in tandem with one another. Ideally, we would want the curriculum to make sure that those skills and knowledge can be promoted in ways that work in tandem with one another.

In my own research, I have done a lot of work looking at functional and critical sides of media digital literacy. The functional side of media literacy has to do with not just practical skills but also understanding digital affordances, the technical features of these platforms and what these features enable users to do or not to do. The critical side, which is what I call critical media or digital literacy, relates to not just the ability to evaluate online content but also understand critically the broader digital ecology, understand the role of platforms, for example, the business models, the implications that come with how they handle data, misuse data and what the potentials and limitations of these technologies are for democratic participation, for democracy.

As part of my research, I have done a lot of work looking at how those functional and critical skills come together when deploying your critical ability to understand the digital environment or to protect your privacy by managing privacy settings. I personally want to see in the curriculum—if we are going to be taking the cross-curricular approach to media literacy, which is expecting multiple subjects to tap into those different elements of media literacy—better co-ordination and an overarching vision as to what we are expecting each subject to deliver and how those elements work together.

Professor Satchwell: Yes, I agree with that. The emphasis on critical literacy is essential, which can begin right from the youngest of children



and go right through education. Those skills, critical literacy, should be embedded in English language and literacy teaching throughout. One of the things that is important when we are thinking about what this curriculum should look like is the knowledge and the skills that young people bring to this topic. One of the issues with teaching media literacy and digital citizenship at the moment is perhaps that children know a lot more than we might give them credit for. There is an imbalance of understanding and knowledge about what children do and children not knowing what adults do, what they should be doing and what they should not be doing. Children are getting quite a lot of mixed messages, such as they should not be online so much, and yet they need to be online in order to learn about things, certainly during covid, for example. Children can be seen as potential experts on this if we support them with teachers' own knowledge and resources and the time to discuss these things in an equal way. Rather than children being told what to do, it is drawing on their knowledge in order to find out how to do things better.

Andrew Ettinger: I agree with both colleagues. We see media literacy as needing to be embedded throughout the curriculum from the early years through key stage 1, key stage 2, key stage 3, 4 and 5 and into HE as well. I agree with Gianfranco that that vision of consistent messaging and consistent approaches across the curriculum will mean that we can ensure that we are tackling misinformation, disinformation and online harms, and the positive aspects around employability and engagement with the curriculum.

The other side of it that we would like to consider is that the interim report from the curriculum assessment review recognises that the curriculum as a whole needs significant modernisation across most subjects. In so doing, you need to equip the children with the literacy skills that they need to engage with the modern curriculum, which will obviously include many more multimodal forms as well. Therefore, it is in terms of media literacy itself and as a way for all children to be able to access a modern curriculum as well that would stand them in better stead for the qualification and employment that they need in the future.

Professor Lundie: I also agree with what Dr Polizzi has said, that young people need to understand that the information ecosystem that we inhabit is not inevitable. It is the product of social and historical structures, conditions, technologies and decisions that have been made, which are contingent and can be changed. Through whole-school approaches to data justice, we can teach young people more than just to navigate that existing ecosystem but how to change it for the better. My research shows that students are getting the message about digital safeguarding. We are doing a good job on digital safeguarding at the moment. They get it. Young people understand the message about digital risk, but sometimes I would have to say that that risk message is skewed towards a focus on the bad actor, malevolent individuals or sometimes moral panics. A few years ago we had Momo and then the Blue Whale challenge, things that are tangential to the real risks and inequalities that exist in the digital space.



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However, young people are crying out for the reflective capacities and the skills to take control of the digital world, to make sense of it and to make a positive difference for themselves and their communities. This is where, I am sorry to say, I disagree with Professor Satchwell. I do not believe that young people are experts in this. We need to take a step back. Yes, young people know more than we probably do about what the latest app is and its affordances, but it is the deeper capacities of understanding what problem that app is designed to solve, understanding what problems are potentially created by it and having that level of moral reflection that is so important.

There is a strange sort of contradiction here, where we have had computers in schools for 40 years, since those BBC Micros got wheeled into the corner of the classroom, and yet every time something new comes up in the digital sphere, we find ourselves saying that the students know more about it than we do, that teachers are not the experts. Actually, the teachers have a huge amount of expertise in guiding young people in the capacities that they need to have. That is the major change. The national curriculum at the moment defines digital literacy as creating confident and creative users of technology. I would argue that today's young people deserve more than that. They need to be confident and agentive creators, curators and editors of their own digital experience.

Professor Satchwell: Could I explain that I said they are potential experts, not that they are experts? I agree with you completely that the children who we have been seeing recently, who come to our university and we do media literacy sessions with them, overestimate their understanding of fake news and misinformation, disinformation and so on. However, they also have a lot of insight into what they do. That is what I mean. They know what they do online and they know what they want to do and what they need to do. Maybe that is the thing that is missing. I am not talking about having to do what they say. I am saying that we need to have that understanding to decide how to shape what we teach them and how we teach them.

Teachers who have come to our sessions have also been extremely lacking in confidence, to be honest, and they have said that they would not know how to approach this topic in school. The way that we have done it they have found really helpful, which I should say is informed by The Guardian Foundation's Media Literacy Ambassadors scheme, which I will talk about later. Yes, there is a lack of confidence in the children, which they do not necessarily acknowledge, but also in the teachers.

Q250 **Chair:** Could you explain to us the difference between media literacy and digital citizenship?

Dr Polizzi: I am sure that David will want to say more about this, but I have also worked on a project on digital citizenship a few years ago and I have reviewed literature on this topic and I have done extensive work on media literacy. The way that I look at media literacy is that it is such a crucial concept that then can be applied to multiple related areas. Digital inclusion, for example—issues around digital inequalities and not just in



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terms of physical access to technology, but the skills, functional and critical, that you need to participate—is one way of seeing it. Then you have digital resilience. I have done work on digital resilience, particularly looking at how children develop the coping mechanisms to cope with online risks and online harms. That also, of course, entails aspects of social and emotional learning, because it is not just about the skills, but it is also about that element, and then digital citizenship. David will probably have more to say, but it is such a contested notion in a lot of ways. There have been different approaches in the literature to this concept. Some scholars would see digital citizenship from a more critical pedagogy perspective. That is an approach that I very much welcome in my own work, which is about participation and citizenship and applying those media literacy skills to questions of citizenship, civic engagement, and active engagement in society.

Then there are other approaches, and these are not mutually exclusive. They can all come together as part of an overarching vision, which is more around words like “netiquette”, the moral, ethical sides of things—what you expect children to do in terms of appropriate behaviour online. If they are witnessing an instance of cyberbullying, what should they do? One thing is having the skills to spot misinformation—media literacy—but you may still be the kind of person who has the skills and spreads misinformation precisely because you do not embrace that particular principle, which is around honesty, for example. I have taken in my work a virtue, ethics-based perspective in terms of looking at issues of wisdom and virtues, coupled with media literacy within the digital citizenship context. We should make sure that we promote digital citizenship as something that should run alongside media literacy and ensure that children develop the skills, which is media literacy and especially critical thinking skills but couple that with functional skills, because those are important also in deploying your own criticality. However, that is not just enough. You will have to couple that again with issues around values and virtues and moral decision-making practices. At the same time, citizenship as a subject should come in and play the role of fostering that sense of active civic engagement.

Professor Lundie: I agree that this terminology issue is an important one, the difference between digital literacy and digital citizenship. If you might permit me a brief digression, I will answer this question with an analogy to education at the beginning of the 19th century. Thanks to the work of the churches, the levels of literacy in this country in 1800 were incredibly high, something over 60%, according to most estimates. It is annoying when you see some of these historical programmes and they look at someone who has signed a marriage certificate with an X and they say that this person was illiterate. No, they were unlettered. Back in the 1800s, we drew a distinction between literacy, being able to read, and letters, being able to write. We cannot imagine having that distinction now. We teach reading and writing and they go together. It seems like the most natural thing in the world. If you had asked people in the 1800s, “Why don’t you teach the children how to write?” they would probably have given you three very similar answers to why we are not



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doing a good job of teaching digital citizenship. First, they do not need it, it will give them ideas above the station, or simply being unable to imagine the flourishing of a mass lettered culture, a culture in which everyone was able to write. It did not seem possible, it did not seem necessary, it was too hard.

Again, that is a function of how you are teaching it. Already when I am talking about teaching young people to be creators, I am not talking about coding, or at least I am not talking about the kind of coding that is in the curriculum at the moment. They made it difficult to learn how to write because if you do not teach someone how to do it until they are 11 years old and they have not been learning how to do the pencil grip since they were in reception, it is going to be really hard to learn how to write. People thought of it as a zero-sum game. They thought, "Well, the time we're spending teaching them to write is time we are not teaching them how to read, and reading is the important thing because they need to be able to read scripture". Of course, that also comes down to who is doing the teaching. At that point, it was mostly the churches. They had a couple of hours on a Sunday after service to teach them how to read.

In this country we are making similar mistakes about digital literacy, seeing it only as being the reception of digital tools and not thinking about the potential of having a digitally lettered society, a mass digitally agentive society, of thinking about what it could be for everyone to be able to understand, to step back from those hype cycles and the latest affordances of the latest gadgets and approximates, to thinking about how we can build the digital world that we want. The only way that that happened in the 19th century was that Robert Lowe, Lord Sherbrooke, said that we must educate our new masters. After the 1868 Parliamentary Reform Act came the Education Act. The only way that this happens is if politicians and the public take control of the digital spaces. This is not something that we can wait for the big edtech companies to solve for us, because they do not have an interest in it.

Q251 Mrs Brackenridge: I would like the panel to build on the previous answers on your experience with news literacy skills and particularly the benefits of that for all children and young people. What would better incorporating media literacy look like within the school curriculum? I will start with Andrew, based on something that you referred to earlier about early years all the way through the full journey of school.

Andrew Ettinger: Exactly, because we think that media literacy needs to start in the early years because children of that age are having experience with devices, they may have them in the home and in school, so they need to have that engagement and understanding right from that early age all the way through the system. It needs to be embedded right from that start in a consistent and, as Gianfranco said, a visionary way through the system to make sure that young people have those experiences in an online safe way but can start developing those skills in the same way as they would foundational or functional literacy skills, in the same way that they would do for reading, writing and speaking and listening, being able to use multimedia forms right from those early ages.



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There is quite a lot of evidence that they can be very encouraging ways for younger children to engage with literacy at that time as well, and have it staged all the way through the curriculum right from the start.

Obviously, that will need to be very different and the setting of harm control around that would need to be very measured and the type of devices used, but teachers are trained and skilled at the moment in doing that. If any of you have been into early-years settings or into reception, you will see many iPads and devices used as a form of assessment in the classroom. Children are used to those being there, but having those children at the same time being upskilled in the use of those devices would be helpful and to have that foundational learning right from the start, which can carry on through into the key stages when they are more into school. We would want to see that right from the start and all the way through the curriculum.

However, as I said earlier, we want to see it embedded across all the subjects in the curriculum. We think already about what we call disciplinary literacy, how each subject has its own form of vocabulary, of different forms of speaking, listening and analysis, and media literacy needs to be a key part of that. Media literacy would be different in each of the subjects. You may consider machine learning in maths, you may look at the veracity of online sources in history, or you may look at different forms of texts in English. The forms of multimedia literacy that you will need will be different in the subjects, but under that wider curriculum that makes sure that all stacks together to make a whole as well.

Dr Polizzi: If I can just jump in. I echo what you are saying and I think we should start early. A project that ended last year funded by the Nuffield Foundation was the evaluation of NewsWise, a news media literacy programme delivered by The Guardian Foundation and delivered across the UK. This was a very big piece of work in terms of the number of schools that took part in the trial. We used the randomised control trial methodology coupled with qualitative data collection. It was a very thorough piece of research. We also developed new instruments as part of this project. We were focusing on 9 to 11-year-olds, primary school children.

Media literacy is such a multifaceted concept that it is unlikely you will have a programme delivered by a charity that is going to tap into all the different aspects of media. Perhaps it will prioritise some of those. With this news literacy programme, in particular, the emphasis was on misinformation, fake news, and spotting misinformation. We had very tangible evidence at the end of the programme and the evaluation of it that children really benefited from the programme. They thought that it was educational, it was fun and they retained a lot of knowledge on the different strategies that they can apply when evaluating online content particularly, so it was beneficial.

However, these are scattered examples of good practice. A project like NewsWise that had a lot of money behind it and we were able to engage



with a very robust methodology is not the norm. Normally you would have pockets of good practice. There is a lot of work that you expect charities to do in this space but the work that they do sometimes will be under-resourced and underfunded, and that will have an effect on the methodology and the robustness of those methodologies that they can apply to conduct evaluation. This is not to say that there are no good evaluations out there, but there are not many good evaluations. We still need that work to systematically review the evidence and understand what works and what does not. I think that we need to ensure—and I could not say that more loudly—that media literacy becomes mandatory and that this is not something that relies just on charities developing the occasional intervention but is embedded in the curriculum.

If we are going to take the cross-curricular approach—I keep saying if we are going to take that, because technically the debate traditionally is that you could think of media literacy as a subject on its own. You have a subject already in this country, media studies. Unfortunately, it does not have a good reputation. It is seen as a Mickey Mouse subject and taken by fewer than 10% of GCSE students in England. That is a subject where you already have the emphasis on critical thinking and understanding the broader media ecology. It is right there. However, if we do not want to use that subject and we want every single subject to play a part—and I welcome that kind of approach because I also welcome the intersection of different literacies, like civic literacy in citizenship with media literacy. That is fine, but let's have that overall vision and conversation to ensure that those different subjects will tap into different aspects of media literacy and that we are not just taking a protectionist approach to the concept, we are taking a very overarching comprehensive approach and we make sure that children learn all the creative critical thinking skills that they need and they will be able to apply those to different related areas like digital citizenship.

Q252 Mrs Brackenridge: Thank you. Professor Satchwell and Professor Lundie, I will narrow my question a little bit. From your experience, are there any particular age groups that are specifically at harm from online misinformation? What good practice can you share with a panel based on your experience?

Professor Satchwell: Yes, I think that the age of the child is possibly less important than the setting in which the child exists in school, at home and in their wider environment. Some young children who I have talked to are very wary of online media, they are very anxious about it. They do not want to go near it because have heard lots of stories about how bad it is. Other young people of a similar age might be much more interested in it. A lot of children do not seem to know that there are age limits about what they are allowed on. One young person—I was talking to young people on Saturday about this—said, “I think it’s time to adapt to the fact that children are on all sorts of platforms that they are not supposed to be on”, and work with that rather than just assume that they are not there or just tell them to get off them, because that will not work.



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On the age, I think that teenagers may be the ones who are overestimating their understanding of misinformation and disinformation. A couple said to me recently, "Oh, yes, we can tell". However, it turned out that they were thinking about comedy videos where it was obvious that this was AI-generated. Then we showed them other things and it was quite clear that they had no idea that that was AI-generated. They had seen this story and they had thought that it was true. I think that all ages are at risk, to be honest. I do not know that it progresses like that. Maybe that is why we have to have it in the curriculum all the way through, because right from the youngest children they need to have some understanding that it is possible to be told things that are not true.

It is interesting that you refer to news literacy rather than just media literacy. That has been a specific focus of what we have been doing. You might think that very young children are not interested in the news, but there are some very, very great newspapers specifically designed for very young children, and they can use those in schools to understand how a story is made. It will be something relevant to children, like a storyteller who is making a news story and what his day-to-day life is like as a storyteller. Children can look at this story and they can see how it has been structured. They can see how the voices have come in, and how some of them may be different from others who have different perspectives on it. This sort of thing is critical to the understanding that they will need all the way through, but I think that you can start young. If they had had that, maybe the teenagers would be as savvy as they think they are.

Professor Lundie: I agree entirely. We have heard a lot today about children's funds of knowledge. Sean Harris earlier mentioned children using Minecraft. It is so important for digital citizenship education to recognise the funds of knowledge that students bring to the classroom and the significant challenges they have. Often when we have been running co-production and focus-group workshops with even year 7 or year 8 students, they tell us that they would have liked to have had this earlier. My project is mostly focused on secondary but my pupil focus groups are telling us that they would have liked to have had this earlier.

It is important that when a child comes in with questions in maybe year 4 or year 5 about something that they have seen on Snapchat or TikTok, teachers can talk about this and that they are not simply dismissing it as, "You shouldn't be on that at your age". The reality is, yes, they are on these platforms. This creates other problems. Some of the students in our focus groups have shared with us the challenge that if they did tell TikTok when they were nine that they were 13 to get access, now when they are 14, TikTok thinks that they are 18 and starts giving them a lot of 18-plus content. There are challenges there in terms of regulation and spaces.

As I have said before, when we first brought experts together—educators, ethicists, technologists—to discuss this data justice approach to digital citizenship and critical information literacy, someone said,



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"Didn't we used to have a subject in schools that did all of this, a subject called media studies?" We have seen a lot of the spaces for this work, like media studies, like citizenship, like religious education, get squeezed out of curriculum time. It is not a zero-sum game. It is not a case of having more time for digital citizenship education means having less time for RE or art or whatever. Rather, citizenship teachers and religious studies teachers have a particular skillset. They are very good at holding these brave spaces for exploring challenging content. As Dr Begum said earlier, a lot of teachers feel uncomfortable and unprepared for having some of the difficult conversations that are needed.

There is an importance in having a whole-school approach. We have seen lots of examples of enthusiastic early adopters and great resources but it is patchy across the curriculum. One of the things that we are doing as this project reaches its impact phase is bringing together a whole-school reflective document that will allow schools to look for and signpost them towards some of the good resources that are already out there. They are at a whole range of areas, a whole range of levels.

I will give you one quick example because I realise that we are short on time. A scheme of work was designed to teach key stage 1 students about an algorithm, what an algorithm is and how to write and refine an algorithm. How do you teach that to key stage 1, to five or six year-olds? It does not involve any tech. It involves drawing a crazy monster. You draw your crazy monster and then you write the instructions for how to draw one. You give the instructions to your friend and, "Oh look, they've drawn a different one". What is different? Because they have drawn a bigger body, they have had to put the legs in a different place, and so you can start to refine the algorithm. You can start to see how one friend has drawn it this way, whereas another friend has followed the same instructions but drawn something different. That is a bit like how when you are on YouTube you see something a bit different from what your friend sees because of what they have looked at before. You can start to build that level of literacy.

One of the important principles is not presenting young people with technology before we have had the chance to critically reflect on its affordances. If you were teaching physics, you would not teach quantum physics in key stage 2 before the students have a good grasp of Newtonian physics, because you would give them the impression that the world is indeterminate and random and impossible to grasp. That is not what we are trying to do. We should not be presenting young people with technology that presents itself as almost magic before they have had the opportunity to understand what is going on and without having the opportunity to do that reflection, whether it is something like algorithms in maths, contested narratives in history, intellectual property rights in art. We have seen amazing resources for good digital citizenship education across schools, but at the same time, our survey data suggests that most schools are addressing these issues through form time, assemblies and pastoral. Digital safeguarding is seen as much more than



baseline. Digital safeguarding is absolutely essential, but it is an essential baseline, it is not the end product.

Q253 Mark Sowards: I thought that was an interesting point about media studies. It got a bad rap at the time but I remember studying media studies and it gave me valuable skills to analyse the content that I was seeing. I have never been able to see a documentary in the same way again.

My first question is to Professor Lundie but it is open to anyone to answer. We have a general feeling of how you would answer the first part of the question, so if you could focus on the second part of the question. Our predecessor Committee found that the digital literacy capabilities of children in the UK were, and I am quoting here, "generally poor". That was the conclusion that it made. Do you agree? Short answers to that one. How should the curriculum and assessment review address this? That is the question I would like you to answer.

Professor Lundie: We need to step back from the hype cycle. Three times in this country we have been taken in by today's hype and have formed the curriculum around ICT in the 1990s, coding in the 2010s and now we are at risk of making the same mistake again for AI, teaching tomorrow's workforce to be the most expendable and exploitable users of what will quickly become yesterday's tech. Today's young people deserve more than that. They need to become, as I have said before, confident, reflective, agentive creators, curators and editors of the better digital commons of the future. That is the main point. Step back from just what the latest tech can do. Think about putting educators at the heart of innovation. First, what do educators need, then having whole school approaches to the ethics, the values, the pedagogical uses of the technology, and only then making sure that the infrastructure, the tech itself, supports that learning and teaching.

Dr Polizzi: I agree with what you just said, David. The answer to your first question is yes, the levels of critical media literacy skills are not very high among children and young people. Just look at Ofcom surveys. Its annual survey shows their ability and they think that they are more confident than they are in practice when it comes to evaluating content. However, something that they added to their annual survey, which I think is troubling, the finding that more than 50% of children would think that an AI-generated outcome is either as reliable as a human or potentially more reliable than a human, which I think is absolutely alarming.

As we know, there are pockets of good practice. Some schools tend to incorporate elements of media literacy education. It is very challenging for them because the curriculum is already very packed, so make it mandatory. English, citizenship, computing, PSHE, these subjects will need to play a role in delivering the provision of media literacy education in ways that are different but complement each other. That is what you need to do. You need to think about all the different skills and knowledge areas that you want children to develop, you need to think about the role



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of those different subjects and how they can work together. You equally need to better understand the landscape and perhaps put some money into systematic reviews and understanding what works in practice, what does not work in practice, what are the examples of good practice, and what evidence we have so that we can use that knowledge to support not just the curriculum but also teachers.

When it comes to teachers, they need better training, they need more guidance and they need training. The training has to be twofold. They need training in terms of developing their own media digital literacy skills in the first place and training and support in how to deliver media literacy education across different subjects.

Andrew Ettinger: I completely agree with both colleagues, but we also need to think about how this will be implemented in schools because at the moment we are talking about a curriculum that is three years away. If we start thinking about how long something that starts in the early years filters through the system, that will be a long way off. Therefore, we need to think first about how we maintain the momentum that is being built now. I completely take the point that charities running programmes cannot fix it, but they can help in the interim, at the very least. We need to be making sure that this is still happening in schools now rather than waiting for the curriculum to be implemented.

We also need to think that this is to some extent a curriculum issue and, beyond that, a pedagogical challenge as well. We need to think about how teachers not only know what they are going to be teaching but how they will be teaching it, to think about how the DfE use its golden thread of teacher CPD going from IT through ECF and into leadership training. Changing things in teacher training alone takes years to filter through the system, so we need to be looking at the stock of teachers as well as the incoming teachers to make sure that not only is there no gap running up to this, but when it is implemented it is fully implemented into schools.

Thinking slightly beyond the curriculum, this is also something we need to think about for communities and families because media literacy permeates people's lives now. We are digital citizens and digital natives, particularly our young people, so families also need support with this. Communities need to think, as we heard earlier, about how the curriculum plays out differently in different communities and what needs to be dialled up and dialled down, and to think about the use of civic spaces, particularly libraries, public and school, as safe spaces or third spaces where media literacy skills can be put into practice in supportive ways. However, we know that there are challenges with that. We found that one in seven primary schools does not have a decent library provision anymore, going up to one in four in disadvantaged areas. We know that many public libraries have been removed from our communities or families facing the highest disadvantage may not have the bus fare to get to the library. We need to make sure that this is permeating through our cultural life now, because this is how the world is



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changing and we need to modernise how we think about our approach to the skill development in young people.

Professor Satchwell: I agree that the digital literacy skills of young people are not what they should be for them to navigate life as they would want to and as they should be able to. How are we going to address them? In addition to what everybody else has said—and I do not need to repeat it—linking it to everyday life would be really helpful. I agree that it should fit in every subject from science to English to religious studies or whatever. However, it is also relevant in everyday life. What children are doing in school is very often still using pencil and paper and colouring tools. There is nothing wrong with that, but what they are doing in their home lives is probably not quite the same, and they may have much more access. As I said earlier, this is very different in different households and in different areas, but they may be much more online at home with their siblings and their families than they are at school. Some of these skills need to be taught in school but they need to have similar settings and equipment as at home.

Again, there are disparities in how many children have access to a mobile phone or a computer and they might be sharing those devices or whatever, but this everyday-life thing is important because that is where the children are doing things that we do not necessarily know about, that they could bring in if we approach it in an open manner where it is something to be discussed and something to be debated and that we can learn from together. The teachers would be learning as well as the children would be learning from each other and from the discussion. I think that that would really help.

Q254 **Darren Paffey:** A number of you have already made the observation that media literacy and digital citizenship are split across a number of curriculum subjects and sometimes ad hoc in form time and other sessions. Yes or no, do you think that that is the right approach? If not, what needs to change?

Professor Satchwell: Yes, I think that it should be in every subject in the sense that every subject should have an element of critical thinking within it. Whether you are thinking about a scientific fact or a story, a novel, you still need to think about how that has been arrived at. How has that scientific fact been arrived at? How come some scientific facts seem to change over time? How come this novel is written by this person from this perspective and yet this one seems to be different and is presenting a different perspective?

It does need to be everywhere but there is a particular place in English language where it could be addressed to most children. Most children take GCSE English language, not all but most do. There is a space in there—there could be a space in there—if perhaps, for example, some of the literature was taken out of the English language GCSE and left in the literature GCSE. That would give you a nice space where you could explore some of these issues to do with media literacy, news literacy, digital literacy, and it all uses the same skills. It is about creating and



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using language, understanding language, using language to communicate in different ways across different modalities and using multiple literacies. All of these things could be relevant to lots of children. They would find it interesting and, to be honest, possibly more interesting than they find the current GCSE curriculum in English language and English literature, which is a sad thing to say but a lot of children are not enthused by it, as you can tell by how few students go on to do A-level English and how even fewer go on to do it at university. I can vouch for that, coming from a humanities division at my university. It is having an impact.

Dr Polizzi: I agree that English ability has an important role to play. I do think, though, there are other disciplines as well. They obviously need to complement that teaching, because you also want to equip them with knowledge of the broader digital environment, issues of affordances, how platforms operate. There may be other subjects that could do that in tandem with the critical thinking. A subject like English would be able to encourage children to develop. It is absolutely important that all these subjects will have a role to play. My concern is that if we say that all the different subjects will do it, it is fragmented and scattered in the curriculum and it is everywhere but nowhere at the same time.

In my own work throughout the last decade or so, I have thought multiple times that it would be great if you have a subject like media studies. I am also conscious that will not happen. We want different subjects to do the role of working together, but that can only happen if there is really an overarching vision of how different functionally critical elements of media literacy work together, for example. I will give you an example—evaluating online content. You think of it as a critical ability, it is critical thinking. Sure, but in practice, when you are online you are doing it in ways that will rely on functional skills, like using different search engines or understanding the affordances of algorithms and how they create filter bubbles that will present you with information that reinforces your persisting beliefs, which undermines your ability to diversify your exposure to information, because you cannot compare and contrast information across multiple sources if you are within your own filter bubble.

If the reason and understanding and a functional understanding, of affordances runs parallel with the critical thinking that a subject like English surely will place emphasis on, this will not work. Either you go with one subject and you redeem that subject from the bad reputation, that is hard and you make it mandatory because you acknowledge that the subject is indispensable in this day and age—and I think that it is—and maybe you can draw on media studies for examples of good practices and resources and things that you can utilise from that subject to ensure that many different subjects will work together.

Andrew Ettinger: Yes, being embedded across the curriculum is the right approach, but, no, not the way it is being done now. As Gianfranco said earlier, a measured consistent vision of how media literacy fits together across that curriculum is very important and, as I said earlier,



how media literacy supports the development and delivery of the individual subjects in the curriculum as well. What does the media literacy look like in maths as opposed to history to make sure that it truly enters that? To counter that—and I take the point that it is everybody's job, which means it is nobody's job—if this is, as well as media literacy in its own right, about the access to the curriculum as a whole, because we are modelling that to produce that contemporary experience of history, of PE, of maths, then it becomes more the teachers' responsibility to make sure that they are continuously upskilled and delivering effective media literacy because it enables their children to succeed in their subjects.

Professor Lundie: Yes, it absolutely has to be something that goes across the curriculum, but in a systematic way not in a fragmented way. As everyone else has already said, there is a difference between a systematic approach and a fragmented one. Literacy, for example, would be seen as a whole-school responsibility. A teacher could not get away with saying, "I don't really do literacy". You can still get away with saying, "I don't really do technology". There are still some Luddites out there.

On this project, though, we have seen a new professional pathway opening up of schools or MATs having digital champions and learning technologists. Where these roles are well managed and supported, they have huge potential to empower teachers and enhance children's capacities, but there is little guidance or formal professional education or skill pathways for these people. If they are used the wrong way, these qualified teachers and enthusiastic experts can end up just becoming IT technicians for the school. I think that there is a need for more strategic guidance, more professional recognition for those people and a more systematic way of holding schools accountable for what is the whole-school vision for digital citizenship.

Q255 **Manuela Perteghella:** Dr Polizzi, in your evidence to the Lords Committee you criticised the lack of an overarching framework for media literacy and also criticised the siloes between Government Departments. What has been the impact of this and what should be done to address it?

Dr Polizzi: Thank you for asking that question. As I said at the very beginning, I have done work in schools looking at children in the primary and secondary sectors, and adults. I have done lots of work in digital inclusion, looking at how digital media literacy plays a part within that area of work, and focusing on the work of charities, focusing on the role of policymakers and local governments and local authorities. When it comes to the media literacy sector as a whole, when I am going beyond just formal education and I thinking about adults and children and the whole country, yes, it is fragmented and patchy. These are the keywords. You have pockets of good practice, you have things happening in the Liverpool City region, in Greater Manchester. For example, there is a good appetite for digital inclusion and media literacy, but is that happening consistently everywhere in the country? No, not really.



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The siloes and the problem with the lack and the limited communication between governments is something that surely has exacerbated this problem. In the last few years, for example, I have noticed how Departments like DCMS think about the online media literacy strategy that was published in 2021, alongside the Internet Safety Act that just came out in 2023, and then think about DSIT, which has taken over the job of the DCMS in looking at media literacy. Ofcom has been doing brilliant work in this area. I am part of the Ofcom Making Sense of Media research evaluation and working groups. I advise on issues relating to provision, evaluation and research.

But where was DfE, with all due respect? For so long we had conversations within the media literacy community about the importance of media literacy, which is such an inherently pedagogical concept, as we think we can all agree, and yet DfE was barely in the room. DfE had to wait until 2024 to launch another review of the curriculum. There has been so much work done by Ofcom and DSIT and oftentimes not even in synergy with one another, because you would have duplication of initiatives, you would have calls that are similar, but then why are you not tapping into that element that is under-researched and underexplored? There has been a lack of communication within the media literacy sector as a whole. I hope that with this review of the curriculum, DfE will be far more proactive in wanting to ensure that children will learn media literacy through formal education.

Q256 Amanda Martin: This Committee's own screentime inquiry, alongside the School Workforce Census and the Ofsted 2022 review raised concerns about the lack of subject specialism in media literacy and digital citizenship and found that there are assumptions that pupils are digital natives and do not need teaching. In addressing these issues, do you believe that teachers have adequate skills and expertise to teach media literacy and digital citizenship? If not, what should be done to upskill them both currently and in future? Secondly, on the other assumption, do you believe that schools wrongly assume that pupils do not need to be taught digital literacy as they have grown up in the digital world? What should be done to address these assumptions?

Dr Polizzi: Sorry, I find it laughable. They are not digital natives. Perhaps the functional critical distinction can help with the debate that we were having before. Perhaps some of these children grow up with technology and they learn some of those functional skills a little bit more easily than their parents, but in terms of critical thinking, criticality and developing the values that you need to be a digital citizen in this day and age, there is a lot that children need to learn, and, yes, teachers are under-resourced and under-supported. There needs to be funding supporting the development of teachers and making sure that we train them adequately so that they can feel confident when they are delivering media literacy education through their own subjects.

Andrew Ettinger: On the first point, I was drawing echoes from Dr Begum's evidence before on changes to the diversity of English set texts in the exam curriculum. Some of the similar issues draw through here. I



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do not agree with David that there is a lack of will from teachers to push forward on this agenda, but they have low confidence, they have low skills and there is a lack of resources in schools that enables them to properly do this. There is work to be done, as I said earlier, on how we can embed media literacy across the range of CPD that is offered to teachers.

We deliver a programme called Empower, which is designed specifically to help young girls who have been excluded, or are at risk of exclusion, with identifying misinformation. When we evaluated the programme, we found that six months later 95% of the teachers involved were still using media literacy activities in their teaching, so sometimes that confidence-building and upskilling is what teachers need to be able to help them overcome this. At the moment it is not part of the ITT framework, it is not part of any training that DfE mandates at all. Therefore, many teachers are coming to this as a new area and something that they feel inexperienced in and they do not have the resources in the school to allow them to teach these things effectively either. We think that it is about confidence-building upskilling and resources for schools in order to make this really effective.

Professor Lundie: I just want to nuance what I said before. I think that for a lot of teachers who are perhaps a bit more cynical about technology, it is not that they do not want to use technology effectively in their learning. It is often that because the technology is imposed upon them, whether by senior leadership or the wider external world telling them that everyone's doing this and they need to do it, they feel they do not have agency over it.

I would also highlight John Gordon's work at the University of East Anglia on teacher agency in the use of technology. This is where I think that it is key for schools to take a step back, as I have said before, from that hype cycle. Put educators at the heart of innovation and think through whole-school approaches to the pedagogical uses of technology. I will give you one example. A local authority did a high-profile deal with Apple for one-to-one devices for all of its pupils. Problem one, the classrooms in one school, which were built with a good view to sustainability to maximise natural light, created too much glare to use the iPads, so now the school has to enter into another much less high-profile deal with a window company that is charging them £2,500 per classroom to install blackouts. Problem two, another school in the same local authority had trouble weaning pupils off of a successful "bring your own device" policy, which often meant them bringing in their own phones, because those were the one device that they had. Now they invest in expensive pouches that the pupils can put their iPhone into—that they have brought to school, that they understand how to use—and take out an iPad that has the exact same affordances, which has been bought by the local authority at great cost.

It is this being dazzled by the tech rather than thinking first about the pedagogy that we need to move away from, that concern about how



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much screen time or what technology and devices should we be using, what devices should we be banning. Those are the wrong questions to ask. We need to be asking teachers, because teachers know what technology they need to use and engage in with their young people, and the skills that they need.

Professor Satchwell: I know that we are short of time, but the children and young people who have been coming to our workshops have had their eyes opened to some of the ideas that we present to them like they can check where a photograph is from and they can check a story online and they can follow the algorithms and so on if they know how or if they know what that is. What some of the young people have said to us about this—I have gone around and said, “Do you think this is important?” They are absolutely adamant that it is really important and that they do not know how to do these things. I know that I started off with that controversial statement. I did not mean that they are the experts, but that they use these things all the time. That is what I mean. Therefore, that is where we have to start from.

A young man said to me, “We need to know what’s right from wrong, we need to know what to stand by”. Isn’t that a good reason for teaching these things? Another young woman recently said, because we were talking about—and this is something that perhaps we have not talked about enough—the repercussions of misinformation, disinformation and linking it to social cohesion and social unrest and so on, which is important, obviously, and empathy and prejudice and bias and racism, misogyny. All of these things are really, really relevant and important at the moment. Young people have a clear sense of right and wrong, I think. They often say, “That’s not fair”. They have a sense of what fairness is and I think that we can frame a lot of this in terms of, “Is that fair? Let’s listen to the other side”.

The other thing that I wanted to say is that teachers definitely do want resources and they do want to develop their skills. They want the time to be able to bring it into the curriculum. Some of the schools that are, for example, in special measures are probably the schools that need it the most for their children and yet they are the ones who have the least confidence because they are constantly striving to reach the attainment goals that they have been set and having to fit strictly within the curriculum. Because it is not in the curriculum, the children are not getting it and they are probably the ones that need it the most.

Chair: Thank you very much. That brings us to the end of our evidence session today. Thank you all very much for coming today to give your evidence to us. Can I say, as I always do, that we know that time is constrained in these oral evidence sessions and if there is any information that you did not have the time to convey to us today that you would like to write to the Committee about after the session, we would very much welcome that as well.