

Written evidence submitted by the BBC

Executive Summary

1. Education is in the BBC's lifeblood and is one of five public purposes laid out in the BBC's Royal Charter. Our online revision content, short-form video, education games and supporting materials are made with the same level of editorial rigour, care and quality that is the hallmark of all of the Corporation's output.
2. We believe that online education content delivered via screens can, when well-made, provide a vital part of the UK's learning ecosystem and have a tangible, positive impact on the educational outcomes and life chances of learners.
3. For example, BBC Bitesize launched as an online product in 1998 and has been supporting learners to pass their exams, whether GCSEs or end-of-term tests, for 25 years. Similarly, our work on BBC Tiny Happy People, an online language acquisition service for parents and carers of early years children, has shown real impacts on participant families in controlled trials.
4. Research for BBC Children's and Education shows that parents agree. 91% of parents are interested in the use of screens to access educational content, such as that made by the BBC, while 65% of those polled feel that high-quality 'on screen' materials can have a positive impact on the creativity and confidence of their children.
5. Care and moderation is necessary. We understand that many parents are concerned about their children's 'screen time', while recent BBC research into the teen populace suggests that their online lives can be a cause of anxiety and that more should be done to educate and manage issues they come across on social media and in online spaces.
6. As a public service broadcaster, the BBC is in a unique position to address this. When it comes to screens, it's what's on them that counts rather than a binary 'good' or 'bad' indictment towards usage of such content.
7. Quality control and editorial rigour is important, but so is in-person teaching and activation. Teachers know their classes better than anyone; online education activities are supplementary to their expertise and should be driven by their recommendation rather than supplanting it.
8. Many of our educational campaigns and services, including Tiny Happy People, BBC Bitesize and BBC micro:bit: The Next Gen, involve in-person work, bringing our work directly to classrooms and community spaces while supporting teachers to make the most of our resources through training and confidence building sessions.

Education at the BBC

9. The BBC's Royal Charter obliges us to deliver curriculum content for all children and teenagers in the UK. Our primary means of fulfilling this commitment is online, through our direct-to-learner service **BBC Bitesize**¹, our teacher facing platform **BBC Teach**², our service

¹ [BBC Bitesize](#)

² [BBC Teach](#)

for early years language **Tiny Happy People**³ and our award winning educational campaigns. We reach over 2.5m learners per week across all of our online services.

10. Now in its 25th year and launched in the infancy of online education, **BBC Bitesize** is the UK's most-used and most comprehensive learning platform, offering a mix of specially commissioned video, images, text and games across almost 20,000 learner guides for 4-16 year olds.
11. **BBC Teach** is the home of our archive of Class Clips from the BBC's factual, documentary and drama archives and hosts specially commissioned content which requires specific teacher mediation – including many topics from the PSHE curriculum such as race, relationships and mental health. BBC Teach also develops an annual series of Live Lessons for primary learners, with an Internet Safety Day special, developed and delivered with Childnet and the UK Safer Internet Centre a regular feature.
12. Alongside our core curriculum content Bitesize also features a host of specialist Study Support⁴ content to assist learners with revision, wellbeing and mental health. For younger learners, **BBC Own It**⁵ provides tips and resources to ensure children and young people stay safe online and to help parents understand trends and topics around young people's digital lives.
13. Launched in 2022, **Other Side of the Story**⁶ is a media literacy campaign led by BBC Education and BBC News which collects together content explaining online phenomena such as fake news, echo chambers and disinformation with topical explainers and games designed to help teens (and their parents and teachers) navigate high-profile trends and issues such as the influencer Andrew Tate and the rise of AI. The campaign also provides content designed to help teens create their own news reports, packages and podcasts to help them appreciate the skills and standards that go into producing high-quality, factually accurate news content.
14. The BBC has worked with the University of Sheffield's language acquisition experts to assess the efficacy of the online **Tiny Happy People** collections via a structured, longitudinal evaluation. Interim findings of this study have found that repeated usage of THP's films and content had a tangible impact on language acquisition at age 18 months, suggesting that online content can work as part of a holistic parent-centred approach to learning even amongst the youngest learners.

Our Approach to Education Content

15. All BBC Education output meets the Corporation's standards of due impartiality and editorial rigour. Every aspect of our content is developed in harness with experienced teachers and educational consultants, and we request that all indie production houses commissioned by us follow this approach too. This ensures a double process of quality assurance and curriculum relevance. The BBC also has strict rules around portrayal of children and around safeguarding. Where a topic requires particular sensitivity our Education teams work closely with our safeguarding and editorial policy teams to ensure the highest standards are met.

³ [BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

⁴ [BBC Bitesize Study Support](#)

⁵ [BBC Own It](#)

⁶ [BBC Bitesize Other Side of the Story](#)

16. While we provide educational content online to support both self-study and classroom based learning, the BBC notes that our offer is best used as part of a holistic and varied approach to education, which should be led by teachers, and ideally in-person. Building on this outlook, in-person activation forms a key part of our offer – especially where audience research or expert opinion view this as especially important.
17. For example, Tiny Happy People works closely with partners in the early years field, including the National Literacy Trust and Home Start, and with speech and language professionals to deliver sessions for parents and toddlers through schemes like the NLT’s Early Words Together⁷. The BBC has also recently partnered with Children in Need and ASDA to bring Tiny Happy People, and speech and language professionals, to supermarket community rooms across the UK as a means to engage those hard-to-reach audiences who independent research has shown are most likely to be impacted by speech and language issues⁸.
18. Similarly, in-person activation and outreach has proven particularly effective to both the Other Side of the Story campaign and our careers focussed output. Other Side of the Story has delivered intensive, four session pilots in 13 schools in majority C2DE catchment areas, designed to offer an interactive and engaging route into the topic of media literacy and offer learners agency over their decisions. Other Side of the Story is delivering a further 20 workshops across 10 schools between September and December 2023.
19. Similarly, the Bitesize Schools Tour will visit 167 schools in 2023 and 2024, bringing a careers focussed experience to learners in locations across the UK, with a focus on C2DE catchment areas. These sessions bring local people with inspiring careers and personal stories to the classroom and support delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Our Audiences and Screen Content

20. Research undertaken for BBC Children’s & Education indicates that a large majority of parents (79%) feel that their children use screens more often since the COVID pandemic⁹, with 67% of those surveyed concerned about the content their children are consuming¹⁰.
21. However despite these concerns, our survey confirms that parents recognise the positive impact screens can have with 65% agreeing they have the ability to foster creativity and communication, emphasising the importance of providing quality and trusted content to support children’s development. The right content is therefore believed to have a positive impact on children’s development with a focus on crucial ‘softer skills’ learned outside the classroom¹¹.
22. Moreover, 93% of parents are interested in the use of screens to access educational content, such as that made by BBC Bitesize, BBC Teach and BBC Tiny Happy People, while 51% view this type of content as the ‘most important’ type of content accessed by children¹². 70% say it is important that their content their child access comes from a trusted source¹³.

⁷ [National Literacy Trust, Early Words Together](#)

⁸ [Improving Pre-School Language Could Boost the Economy by £1.2bn](#), Pro Bono Economics for THP partners KPMG, February 2021

⁹ [BBC Children’s & Education Surveys Parents Attitudes to Screen Time](#), July 2023

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

23. **Teen 23**, a major study and programming strand for BBC Bitesize, Other Side of the Story and BBC 5Live, launched in September 2023, also examined the role of social media and online relationships in the lives of young people¹⁴. BBC Bitesize produced a series of articles addressing the topics of the study and offering tips to those affected by the themes discussed, including surviving as a teenager¹⁵ and coping with anxiety¹⁶.
24. The Teen 23 survey found that over half of teens (55%) were most likely to connect with friends online – through social media, websites and gaming platforms – outside of school hours. Albeit a majority (59%) preferred in-person interaction to online interaction (18%). WhatsApp (72%), Snapchat (66%) and Instagram (58%) were the most commonly used forms of social media for connecting with friends.
25. 65% of those questioned had not messaged a stranger online, although 31% had. Of those who had messaged a stranger online, a large majority (65%) would not consider meeting them in person. Almost 90% knew who to talk to if they had any concerns about people they had messaged online.
26. A majority of teens (68%) were not concerned about the time they spend online, however 56% also stated that they felt anxious if they did not have access to their smartphones. In terms of social media usage, almost half (47%) of teens polled did not feel it impacted their mood, with only 11% feeling it has a negative impact or makes them 'feel low'.

October 2023

¹⁴ [BBC Teen 23 Summit](#), September 2023

¹⁵ [How To Survive As a Teenager](#), BBC Bitesize, September 2023

¹⁶ [Understanding Anxiety and Low Mood](#), BBC Bitesize, September 2023