

HM Government-Department for Culture, Media and Sport—written evidence (FON0009)

House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee inquiry: The future of news: impartiality, trust and technology

Introduction

1. The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport is pleased to respond to the Select Committee's Call for Evidence requesting views on the future of news: impartiality, trust and technology. We value the Committee's thoughtful contribution to policy construction in the field of media policy, and our Secretary of State was grateful for the opportunity to appear in front of the Committee last September.
2. The Government is committed to a pluralistic media landscape, where citizens are able to access information and form opinions using a range of sources. Access to a wide range of news, views and information about the world in which we live is central to the health of our democracy. Trustworthy journalism plays an invaluable role in the fabric of our society, in supporting communities and ensuring the provision of reliable, high-quality information. Our news media remains uniquely placed to undertake the investigative journalism and scrutiny of public institutions that are vital to helping ensure a healthy democracy both nationally and at a local level.
3. At the same time, the Government recognises that society's shift online presents new challenges and opportunities to news media and to the provision of trustworthy information. We are taking action to support broadcasters and news publishers in adapting to this shift. We want to ensure the UK continues to benefit from a future-proofed, competitive and appropriately-regulated broadcast sector, and a free, diverse and sustainable press, collectively underpinned by high-quality journalism.
4. This inquiry is therefore timely and focused on a vitally important topic. We look forward to following the Committee's findings and responding to your report.

1. What impacts (positive and negative) do large technology platforms and online news aggregators have on the UK's news environment, including media plurality? And how might this change?

5. The impact of large technology firms and news aggregators on the UK news environment raises both commercial and social considerations. With regard to commercial concerns, the Cairncross Review into the future of journalism concluded in 2019 that some of the biggest tech firms are able to impose unfair terms on publishers, which limits publishers' ability to monetise their content and threatens the sustainability of the press. The 2020 Competition and Markets Authority's market study into online platforms and digital advertising provided further evidence and analysis to show how the unbalanced relationship between platforms and publishers in the digital advertising market, and in the means by which content is

distributed, are directly linked to the sustainability of high-quality journalism in the UK.

6. The Government has introduced legislation to address the far-reaching power of the biggest tech firms, building on the findings of the CMA's market study. Among many other things, the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers (DMCC) Bill will help rebalance the relationship between publishers and online platforms on which they rely increasingly.
7. Separate to these commercial concerns, there arise questions about the role and impact of online news intermediaries which play an increasingly important role in curating and recommending news content. As the Call for Evidence highlights, Ofcom has been exploring the possible impacts of the growth of online news, and the role of online intermediaries in particular, on media plurality, and what, if any, regulatory changes may be necessary to maintain and secure it.¹ We will consider Ofcom's recommendations when its findings are published.

2. How is generative AI affecting news media business models and how might this evolve?

8. Rapid recent developments in generative AI pose significant risks and opportunities for news media, and the Government is intent on supporting the sector to capitalise on the huge potential benefits of the technology, while mitigating its risks.
9. We are engaging extensively with stakeholders on the impact of AI on journalism. The DCMS Secretary of State convened roundtables with broadcasters and news publishers in October 2023 to discuss their concerns about losing control of their copyright material to develop and train AI models, increased competition in news provision from AI firms and others who may have lower editorial and ethical standards and the spread of AI-generated mis/disinformation. The meetings also considered the opportunities AI presents to newsrooms across the UK, looking particularly at how this developing technology can benefit local and regional news outlets and help publishers become more financially sustainable. For instance, AI has the potential to drive productivity by streamlining administrative tasks, cutting overhead costs and freeing journalists to concentrate their efforts on meaningful reporting while retaining human editorial oversight. Discussions with the sector on these issues continue, as we develop our understanding of the long-term impact of generative AI on news media.
10. Regarding concerns about the interaction between intellectual property law and generative AI, we recognise the importance of ensuring AI development supports, rather than undermines the provision of trustworthy information, as well as human creativity and innovation. News publishers are among many rights holders concerned at the large-scale use of copyright-protected content for training AI models and have called for assurance that their ability to retain autonomy and control over their

¹ [Media plurality and online news: Discussion document](#)

valuable work, as well as transparency over its use, will be protected. As highlighted in the government response to the AI regulation White Paper, the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) convened a working group made up of rights holders and AI developers on the interaction between copyright and AI. The working group provided a valuable forum for stakeholders to share their views. Unfortunately, it is now clear that the working group will not be able to agree on an effective voluntary code. DSIT and DCMS ministers will now lead a period of engagement with the AI and rights holder sectors, seeking to ensure the workability and effectiveness of an approach that allows the AI and creative sectors to grow together in partnership. The government is committed to the growth of our world-leading creative industries and we recognise the importance of ensuring AI development supports, rather than undermines, human creativity, innovation, and the provision of trustworthy information. Our approach will need to be underpinned by trust and transparency between parties, with greater transparency from AI developers in relation to data inputs and the attribution of outputs having an important role to play. Our work will therefore also include exploring mechanisms for providing greater transparency so that rights holders can better understand whether content they produce is used as an input into AI models. The government wants to work closely with rights holders and AI developers to deliver this. Critical to all of this work will also be close engagement with international counterparts who are also working to address these issues. We will soon set out further proposals on the way forward

11. Regarding news publishers' increasing competition concerns, the powers we are providing the Competition and Markets Authority's new Digital Markets Unit through the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill have been designed to be future-proof and flexible enough to adapt to changing digital markets, including in markets affected by developments in AI. A firm could be designated as subject to the regime in respect of, for example, an AI-integrated search engine where the designation conditions are met. Even where a firm's AI driven capabilities do not directly form part of the designated activity, the DMU will be able to prevent SMS firms from using other parts of their business to further entrench their market power or strategic position. This might for example include preventing a firm from using its AI capabilities in another activity to further entrench market dominance in designated social media.

3. How are perceptions of due impartiality evolving and what challenges do news organisations face around impartial reporting?

12. It is important to distinguish between different conceptions of impartiality. Current legislation around "due impartiality" derives from sections 319 and 320 of the Communications Act 2003, and relates to news (as well as certain non-news content) included on Ofcom licensed television and radio services. The rules are set out in Ofcom's [Broadcasting Code](#).
13. Due impartiality rules on television are designed to ensure that audiences encounter a diverse array of voices and perspectives and have access to a fair and balanced news source, particularly given TV's huge reach to all audiences and ability to influence them. Ofcom news consumption

research shows that broadcast TV is the most used platform for news content (by 70% of UK adults). UK audiences consistently rate TV news as more accurate and trustworthy compared to sources like social media, with increasing concerns around disinformation.

14. Building on requirements in their Charter and Framework Agreement, the BBC have specific additional commitments in relation to impartiality. The BBC's [editorial guidelines expressly extend the concept of due impartiality](#), beyond news and current affairs to "all output". This means the BBC commits itself to achieving 'due impartiality' on different types of programming like entertainment, and across its radio and online services. It affords staff the "freedom to explore subjects from one perspective and to create content that reflects their own distinctive voice", but states that when doing so it "must be clear to audiences where personal views are being expressed".
15. This approach allows for a plural landscape, in which there remains no legal requirement for newspapers or news websites to report the news with due impartiality. In their 2023 [News Consumption Report](#), Ofcom reported on audience perceptions of the impartiality of news across several mediums. The report found that 63% of regular users agreed that TV news was impartial (2018: 63%), and 58% agreed that radio news was impartial (2018: 59%). Ofcom found that 61% of regular users agreed that print news was impartial (2018: 56%).

Perceptions of the BBC's impartiality

16. As set out in the Government's [BBC Mid-Term Review](#) of the BBC's governance and regulation, published on 22 January 2024, audience perceptions that the BBC is not sufficiently impartial is an ongoing issue and, within a culture of continuous improvement, more can be done. Impartiality is a complex concept and one that is highly subjective in nature, reflecting different attitudes towards prejudice and bias. Different people will necessarily have different views of what is and is not impartial. The BBC has a specific responsibility to impartially serve all audiences, and therefore audience perception of the BBC's impartiality is a key metric in understanding how it is delivering for audiences.
17. Ofcom published [research conducted by Jigsaw](#), an independent research organisation, on the drivers of perceptions of due impartiality, exploring audience attitudes towards the due impartiality of BBC services in the context of the wider news landscape. This was published alongside Ofcom's report '[How Ofcom regulates the BBC](#)' in June 2022.
18. While acknowledging that audience attitudes on due impartiality continue to be driven by multiple factors, Ofcom concluded that the BBC must continue to focus on addressing audience perceptions of impartiality, stating in June 2022 that the BBC's impartiality is a "key area of concern" among audiences and "one where they consistently rate it less favourably than trust and accuracy". Ofcom concluded that the BBC should address the apparent disparity between audience attitudes to its impartiality and its good record of compliance with the due impartiality broadcasting rules. Ofcom also stated the BBC would need to find creative ways of

demonstrating its approach and commitment to due impartiality. Ofcom confirmed again in November 2022 that impartiality was still consistently rated lower for the BBC website/app and BBC TV than trust and accuracy, based on subsequent research.

19. More recently, Ofcom concluded that whilst people in the UK value the role the BBC plays in news provision, impartiality is one of the areas where the BBC is perceived less favourably compared to other aspects of its news delivery, particularly trust and accuracy. Ofcom noted that whilst it recognises that changing audience perceptions of the BBC's due impartiality is a complex process, to maintain audience trust, a focus on impartiality is critical and it is important the BBC retains its focus on this area of work.

4. What factors affect trust in news and how might this evolve?

a) To what extent is trust linked to perceptions of impartiality, or to other trends in online news?

b) What impact do concerns around disinformation have on trust in the information environment? (And to what extent does this differ between different sections of society?)

20. With regards to impartiality, [Ofcom's 2023 News Consumption Report](#) shows some correlation between trust in different media and perceived impartiality, with higher trust in TV, newspapers and radio (69%, 66%, 65% respectively) aligning with higher rates of perceived impartiality (63%, 61% and 58% respectively) as compared to social media (40% for both trust and impartiality).
21. However, it is important to note in any exploration of the factors affecting public trust in media - as highlighted in the latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report cited by the Call for Evidence - that survey scores are aggregates of subjective opinions, not an objective measure of underlying trustworthiness, and changes are often at least as much about broader political and social factors as narrowly about the news itself, or any other issues within the scope of this Call for Evidence.
22. Regardless, the Government takes the issue of disinformation very seriously, including risks posed by AI and deep fakes. We recognise the concerns around AI models generating large volumes of content that is indistinguishable from human generated content, including pictures, voice recordings or videos, and that this would likely significantly impact on trust in the information environment. Enabling users, and institutions, to determine what media is real is a key part of tackling a wide range of AI risks. This includes investigating technical tools that can mark or identify AI generated content, understanding the potential of these technologies and seeing what role the Government can play in supporting their development.
23. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) is also actively working with Ofcom as they implement the Online Safety Act

2023, which will hold social media companies to account against both their own terms and conditions.

24. As well as ensuring companies take action to keep users safe, we are taking steps to educate and empower users with the skills and knowledge they need to keep themselves safe online through our work on media literacy. Our 2021 Online Media Literacy Strategy covers six key challenges, including building resilience to disinformation, and we are providing almost £2.5 million in grant funding for projects designed to build media literacy and critical thinking skills for users of all ages. The Online Safety Act also updates Ofcom’s statutory media literacy duty to require it to take tangible steps to prioritise the public’s awareness of and resilience to misinformation and disinformation online. This includes enabling users to establish the reliability, accuracy, and authenticity of content.

Evaluation

1. How well are news organisations responding to factors affecting their business models, and are any changes needed?

25. Overall news publisher revenues fell by almost a fifth between 2010 and 2018 from £4.5 billion to £3.7 billion², with pandemic-related losses estimated at up to a further £1 billion in 2020.³ Total advertising revenue for newsbrands has declined by nearly 60% between 2011-2021 as the print advertising market has shrunk and revenue from online advertising has not offset losses.⁴ And while many national publishers are developing sustainable online business models, notably around online subscriptions⁵, other publishers are still exploring how best to monetise their online editions, particularly at local level.
26. Continued innovation is a necessary step towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of the news publishing sector, and the government remains committed to supporting the sector to transition to sustainable online business models, including through our manifesto commitment to support local newspapers as vital pillars of our communities.
27. Since the Cairncross Review was published, in addition to the introduction of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill, our support for the sector has included the delivery of a £2 million Future News Fund, designed to invest in new technological prototypes, start-ups and innovative business models to explore new ways of sustaining the industry in this changing landscape; the zero rating of VAT on e-newspapers; the extension of a 2017 business rates relief on local newspaper office space until 2025; the publication of the Online Media Literacy Strategy; and our work through the Mid-Term Review of the BBC Charter to encourage greater collaboration and transparency from the BBC in the local news

² Economic Insight, Press Sector Financial Sustainability, 2022

³ Enders Analysis 2021: Publishing in the pandemic: Print squeeze, digital boost

⁴ AA/Warc expenditure data

⁵ Enders Analysis 2024: UK national news industry: Green shoots of recovery

market and other markets in which it operates. The BBC also supports the sector directly, through the £8m it spends each year on the Local News Partnership, which includes the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme. We continue to consider all possible options in the interests of promoting and sustaining news journalism.

2. How adequately are UK news organisations providing impartial and trusted news? What actions are needed to address any shortcomings?

A) How should news organisations balance competing demands to provide content that aligns with particular values on the one hand, and provides trusted and impartial news on the other?

3. How adequately are news media organisations ensuring that efforts to provide trusted information and tackle disinformation do not alienate some sections of society in the process?

28. See responses to earlier questions on impartiality and trust.

4. How well is regulatory oversight working? Are any changes needed, for example:

A) In the way Ofcom oversees due impartiality and the extent of its remit?

Ofcom's regulation of broadcasting

29. Ofcom is legislatively independent from the government and is accountable to Parliament for its broadcasting regulatory functions. Ofcom has a duty to keep the Broadcasting Code under continual review to ensure that it remains up to date and reflects the current viewing and broadcasting landscape. Ofcom also has an ongoing duty to be satisfied that any person holding a broadcasting licence is fit and proper to hold those licences.

30. There are a number of sanctions available to Ofcom where breaches of the Code have occurred, including levelling a fine, amending, shortening or revoking the broadcaster's licence to broadcast. The Government considers the enforcement powers given to Ofcom to be appropriate to provide a disincentive to organisations from breaching the rules. There are several examples of Ofcom using these enforcement measures to ensure due impartiality rules are upheld.

31. For example, on 18 March 2022, Ofcom [announced](#) the removal of Russia Today's UK broadcast licence on the basis that it did not consider RT's licensee, ANO TV Novosti, fit and proper to hold a UK broadcast licence. The decision was made in the context of 29 ongoing investigations by Ofcom into the due impartiality of RT's news and current affairs coverage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ofcom considered the volume and potentially serious nature of the issues raised within such a short period to be of great concern – especially given RT's compliance history, which had seen the channel fined £200,000 for previous due impartiality breaches. Ofcom also noted that RT is funded by the Russian state, and that new

laws in Russia effectively criminalised any independent journalism that departs from the Russian state's own news narrative, in particular in relation to the invasion of Ukraine. Ofcom considered that given these factors it appeared impossible for RT to comply with the due impartiality rules of the Broadcasting Code.

Ofcom's regulation of video-on-demand services

32. Video-on-demand services are currently not regulated in the UK to the same extent as linear TV channels, and some international services are not regulated in the UK at all. This means that TV-like content in the UK is regulated differently depending on how audiences choose to watch it. This includes news-like programming, where if watched on a traditional TV channel would be regulated under due impartiality rules, but would not be if watched on-demand.
33. Following a public consultation, through the Media Bill the Government is giving Ofcom powers to draft and enforce a new Video-on-demand Code, aimed at mainstream TV-like on-demand services. This will be similar to the Broadcasting Code, which as outlined above, sets out appropriate standards for content on linear television, including protecting under-18s, rules on harmful or offensive material, and due accuracy and due impartiality in news. It will be for Ofcom to determine the specific content of the new Video-on-demand Code subject to the objectives set out in legislation, but it is the Government's expectation that video-on-demand services captured under regulation will be subject to similar rules and standards as the Broadcasting Code. Ofcom will consult extensively with industry before drafting and implementing the new Video-on-demand Code.
34. This world-leading regime will be aimed at mainstream, TV-like video-on-demand services to ensure that major services engaging and profiting from UK audiences at scale are subject to similar obligations as UK broadcasters, no matter where they are based. The specific services that will be subject to the new regulation will be designated as 'Tier 1 services' by the Secretary of State following a review of the video-on-demand market by Ofcom.
35. The legislation will give Ofcom the tools necessary to regulate video-on-demand services, such as information gathering and enforcement powers. Similar statutory sanctions that can be applied to linear broadcasters by Ofcom will also be available to apply to video-on-demand services, such as financial penalties.

Ofcom's regulation of the BBC

36. On 22 January 2024, the Government published [the BBC Mid-Term Review](#). Following the 2015/16 Charter Review, new BBC regulatory arrangements were established: regulation would pass to Ofcom, the BBC's first independent, external regulator. The Mid-Term Review has therefore been an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the regulatory framework designed to ensure the BBC delivers on its responsibilities. One of the themes of the Review was editorial standards and impartiality. Impartiality is core to the BBC's responsibilities under the

Charter, particularly through providing impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them.

37. The Review found no compelling evidence to conclude that Ofcom's regulation of the BBC's editorial standards and impartiality is not thorough, nor that Ofcom requires additional powers to regulate the BBC's broadcast or iPlayer content. Ofcom is responsible for ensuring that the BBC complies with the Broadcasting Code, including requirements around due impartiality. However, we are aware that when the BBC is perceived to be failing in its responsibilities on impartiality, there is the potential for questions to be raised about whether Ofcom is doing enough, or indeed if it has the right powers. We did see evidence that both the BBC and Ofcom are committed to working more closely together to ensure Ofcom has confidence in the BBC's efforts to address concerns about its impartiality. The Review also identified that enhancements to the BBC complaints process would help build the trust that is necessary between the BBC and its audiences, and therefore we endorsed and recommended a series of reforms to enhance transparency. This includes additional responsibilities on Ofcom to undertake mystery-shopping and a recommendation that when the BBC has already identified a breach in its own editorial standards, Ofcom should be more transparent about recording that breach and stating what, if any, further action it is taking and why.
38. We heard concerns about Ofcom's approach to measuring audience perceptions of impartiality and how the approach to publishing findings could be improved. This included the suggestions that Ofcom could sometimes focus less on the BBC's different distribution channels and consider audience perceptions on BBC services in the round (i.e. TV and online together rather than separately) and that Ofcom could benefit from taking less of a 'one size fits all' approach when engaging different types of audiences.
39. We were encouraged to explore whether Ofcom's regulatory role should remain different in relation to BBC online material compared to Ofcom's comprehensive powers over the content the BBC broadcasts on TV and on iPlayer. The BBC is currently responsible for the editorial standards of its material. Ofcom has no enforcement powers relating to the BBC's online material.
40. Whilst we do not propose to make any changes to Ofcom's existing regulatory responsibilities relating to the BBC's broadcast or iPlayer content as a result of the MTR, we do think changes are necessary to Ofcom's responsibilities to reflect that audiences increasingly consume news and other content online. We are therefore committed to giving Ofcom the same regulatory responsibilities for specific BBC online material as it currently has for the BBC's broadcast/iPlayer content. This is a major change and one we hope will further underpin impartiality across more of the BBC's services.
41. We will, in collaboration with Ofcom and the BBC, introduce this recommendation through changes to the Framework Agreement. Ofcom will be required to apply the same principles of the Broadcasting Code in a

new code for BBC online public service material, adapted to reflect the specific characteristics of online material. We will work closely with both Ofcom and the BBC to confirm the precise scope of the new regulatory framework, but our intention is that it will include BBC online public service material that is targeted at UK audiences and over which the BBC has editorial control, including where that is on a third party platform. This means including in scope:

- BBC online activities such as material on the BBC news website; and
- BBC public service branded and editorially controlled material on a third party website, third party application or third party online interface (e.g. YouTube, other video sharing platforms or any website which is not within the bbc.co.uk domain)

42. Some online material would remain out of scope, aligned with equivalent BBC material that is not currently regulated by the Broadcasting Code, such as the BBC's corporate material or content on BBC services where the BBC does not have editorial control (such as 'below the line' comments).
43. Ofcom's research is a crucial element of how it assesses the BBC's performance against its responsibilities, and how it holds the BBC to account as the Corporation's independent regulator. For example, Ofcom's research on how audiences rate the BBC on impartiality of its news content provided important context for the regulator's subsequent review of BBC regulation. If there is doubt about Ofcom's research methods, then there is a risk that the regulator's conclusions and overall role could be undermined. We note that Ofcom already keeps its approach to research under review, and is particularly mindful of the complexity of assessing questions about impartiality. The Review recommends that Ofcom continues to discuss research methodology relating to impartiality (particularly audience perceptions) widely ahead of future research to maximise consensus.

B) In the way Ofcom oversees media plurality?

44. The government is currently reviewing Ofcom's recommendations from its 2021 Statement on Media Plurality. We are considering these carefully, and are analysing the wider implications on the industry, as it is important that any reforms to the regime are proportionate and balance the impact on the public interest with the impact on industry.

5. Are there any actions the Government should take to address concerns around due impartiality, trust, and the influence of technology platforms?

A) Are changes needed to the Media Bill?

45. Whilst the Bill will remove a threat to press sustainability through the repeal of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, the broader

questions posed by this inquiry are not best addressed through the Media Bill.

46. The Bill, which is currently going through passage in the House of Lords, is primarily focused on implementing long-needed reforms to the UK broadcasting and radio sectors, to enable them to compete and remain sustainable in the face of technological change and changing audience habits.
47. News content is an important part of the offer from our public service broadcasters and radio industry, and whilst the Media Bill reforms will help support our news broadcasters to continue to deliver the trusted news content audiences expect, it is not the right vehicle for broader legislation about media plurality and impartiality.

B) Are changes needed to the way the Government addresses mis- and dis-information?

48. The Government recognises that the threat of mis/disinformation is ever-changing, which is why the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology works closely across government and with social media platforms, civil society groups, academia, and international partners, to tackle these risks. Our Online Safety Act, policy and operational approach to information threats ensures we are ready to respond to current and future threats.

Online Safety Act

49. The Online Safety Act will place duties on all companies to tackle mis- and disinformation where it constitutes illegal content or harmful content to children in scope of the regulatory framework. This approach has been designed to tackle the most egregious forms of mis- and disinformation, while still promoting a thriving, inclusive democracy where freedom of expression is protected.
50. Under the Online Safety Act, companies will be forced to take action against illegal content online, including illegal misinformation and disinformation, and will be required to take steps to remove this content - including where it is AI-generated - if they become aware of it on their services. If they do not comply with these duties, they could face fines of £18m or 10% of their global annual revenue, whichever is highest.
51. This includes the False Communications Offence which will capture any manipulated media where the sender of such content is aware it is untrue and intends to cause harm to the recipient. This also includes the Foreign Interference Offence, which has been added as a priority offence in the Online Safety Act, forcing companies to take action against a wide range of state-sponsored disinformation and state-linked interference online.
52. In addition, under the terms of service and accountability duties, if certain types of misinformation and disinformation are prohibited in the largest platforms' terms of service, they will have to remove it. The Government is not, however, in the business of telling companies what legal content

they can and cannot allow on their services - and the Act should not, and will not, interfere with freedom of expression or prevent adults from accessing legal content.

53. If a platform is likely to be accessed by children, the platform will have to protect them from a wide range of harmful content. This includes mis- and disinformation where it intersects with the Act's named categories of harmful content to children, or where mis- and disinformation content otherwise meets the Act's threshold for content that is harmful to children.
54. And while the Act is not specifically designed to tackle AI risks, it has several elements which address AI-generated content. AI-generated content shared by users on social media is regulated like any other user-generated content in the Online Safety Act. AI generated content on user-to-user services is regulated when that content is placed on the service by a user, or if the Generative AI generating the content is itself placed on a service by a user and interacts with other users. That means content generated by AI but shared by users on social media will be in scope of the Act, as are automated tools such as Twitter bots activated by users on their accounts to upload or generate content.
55. The Act also updates Ofcom's statutory media literacy duty to require it to take tangible steps to prioritise the public's awareness of and resilience to misinformation and disinformation online. This includes enabling users to establish the reliability, accuracy and authenticity of content. Additional measures to tackle this issue under the Act include Ofcom establishing an expert Advisory Committee on Misinformation and Disinformation.

Elections and Mis/Disinformation

56. In 2024, with the largest number of democratic events worldwide, DSIT is actively supporting wider cross-government efforts to protect UK democratic processes and trust in the information environment, including through the Defending Democracy Taskforce and Election Cell.
57. The Defending Democracy Taskforce is an enduring government function which seeks to protect the democratic integrity of the UK from threats of foreign interference, by engaging across government and with Parliament, the UK's intelligence community, the devolved administrations, local authorities, the private sector, and civil society.

Online Media Literacy Strategy

58. Evidence suggests that equipping users with media literacy skills can be effective in building their resilience to dis- and misinformation. In July 2021, the government published the Online Media Literacy Strategy, setting out our ambition for improving the national media literacy landscape.
59. The Strategy sets out 6 key challenges inhibiting the sector from delivering media literacy initiatives in a more wide-reaching, effective, and coordinated manner. This includes challenges around building audiences' resilience to media literacy. We committed to publishing annual Action

Plans to tackle these challenges until the end of Financial Year (FY) 2024/25.

60. Through our current Year 3 Action Plan, published October 2023, we are providing almost £1.4m in grant funding to 13 projects designed to strengthen the media literacy and critical thinking skills of users of all ages. This builds on the £1m funding we provided for projects through our Year 2 Action Plan in FY2022/23.
61. Each of these projects is being evaluated robustly, and the findings will be published on gov.uk and shared with sector stakeholders later this year.

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