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**House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee inquiry:  
Media literacy**

***1. What are the overall aims of delivering media literacy in the UK?***

1) In today's data and AI driven society citizens need more than media literacy as they engage with data driven technologies every day, they need to have data literacy. Together with Professor Simeon Yates from Liverpool University we explain the differences between information, media, data and digital literacy in an open access chapter.<sup>1</sup> As part of a Nuffield Foundation funded project "[Me and My Big Data: Developing Citizens Data Literacies in the UK](#)", our definition for Data Citizenship includes three main dimensions that are important for citizens to have: 1) *Data-Doing* - practical skills about handling and managing data; (2) *Data-Thinking* - critical skills as citizens view, engage with- and analyse the world through data; (3) *Data-Participation* - proactive skills meant to enhance and improve citizens' everyday lives in their communities and individually. The full list of activities that are associated with each dimension can be found in our final report.<sup>2</sup> The Data Citizenship framework views data literacies as the capacity of citizens to "Do" things with, "Think" critically about, and "Participate" socially and politically around their data. Data Citizenship underpin citizens using data they create and share for their own purposes, their understanding of what is done with it by platforms and governments, and their ability to make rights claims about data collected and used by others.

2) One of the key findings from that project is that most people do not know what data means. When asked in surveys and focus groups people did not know what types of data companies and governments have of theirs, which organisations extract and process their data and what purposes they use them for. This is very important, because while everyone is talking about artificial intelligence, it is important to keep in mind that people still do not know what basic terms such as data are. If people do not know what types of data companies have on them (let alone personal data), then how can they make informed decisions when using services/games/platforms everyday? How can they exercise their rights? Citizen's agency is key to a healthy democracy, and therefore developing data literacies programmes is essential for people's resilience, self-determination and wellbeing. We need more understanding of whether people are aware and understand (which is not the same thing) what their digital rights are, whether they know how to

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<sup>1</sup> Yates, S., & Carmi, E. (2024). Developing and Delivering and Data Literacy. In: *Digital Inclusion: International Research and Policy*, edited by Yates, S., and Carmi, E., (249-273). Springer Nature. Available at: [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-28930-9\\_12](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-28930-9_12).

<sup>2</sup> Yates, S., Carmi, E., Lockley, E., Wessels, B., & Pawluczuk, A. (2021). *Me and my Big Data: Understanding Citizens Data Literacies Research Report*. Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/26756/>

exercise their digital rights, and how they can use data to help themselves and others. It is essential for us to understand how to develop awareness and education programmes around these issues. This will help move away from the protectionist approach that UK policymakers and Ofcom have taken so far, of protecting people from online harms, and on to focusing on people's agency, autonomy and self-determination. Yes, people need protection, but they also need the data literacies to proactively and confidently live in the data and AI society without having to rely on civil society when things go wrong, as I show in my report.<sup>3</sup>

3) In addition, our Nuffield Foundation funded project [Minimum Digital Living Standard](#), we add that on top of data literacies skills, people also need a minimum of equipment to live well and be digitally included in society. The main question that guides the project<sup>4</sup> is - "What is the minimum basket of digital goods, services, and skills that households need to live and participate in the digital world?". After conducting a national survey and focus groups, we came to the following definition - "A minimum digital standard of living includes but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect, and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence". We discovered that 4 in 10 households (3.7 million) with children are below the MDLS (45%). In addition, we found that the main predictors of being below MDLS are low socio-economic status, living in a deprived area, being a single parent household, a household with more than 2 children, a household led by someone with disability and/or with non-white ethnicity. These findings highlight that the digital inclusion inquiry and media literacy inquiry are intricately linked and should be developed in conjunction with each other. It also highlights what our findings continue to show in each project - that being poor and coming from a poor background will directly affect how you are digitally included and your levels of data literacies. This also applies especially for people who are digitally excluded and non-users.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, while the government needs to focus on data literacies, digital goods and services to be able to improve this situation, the bigger issue is about poverty and without addressing that any programme that will be developed will face challenges in the long run.

4) The risks of not having adequate data literacies and a minimum digital living standards are manifold:

- Being socially excluded.

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<sup>3</sup> Carmi, E., & Nakou, P. (2023). What Mobilises People Against Big-Tech?. City St. George's report. Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/31373/7/2023%20report%20-%20what%20mobilises%20people%20against%20big%20tech.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Yates, S., Hill, K., Blackwell, C., Davis, A., Padley, M., Stone, E., Polizzi, G., D'Arcy, J., Harris, R., Sheppard, P., Singleton, A., Ye, Z., Carmi, E., Garikipati, S., & Barrera, P. (2024). [A Minimum Digital Living Standard for Households with Children: Overall Findings Report](#).

<sup>5</sup> Yates, S. J., Carmi, E., Lockley, E., Pawluczuk, A., French, T., & Vincent, S. (2020). Who are the limited users of digital systems and media? An examination of UK evidence. *First Monday*, 25(7). Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/26857/>.

- Being manipulated by misinformation, conspiracy theories, disinformation etc. Which is especially harmful around health (Covid-19), relationships (catfishing), elections, finance.
- Being radicalised online (e.g. The Netflix TV series Adolescence).
- These can also have an effect on your life opportunities that are influenced by algorithmic and automated decision making such as insurance, job seeking etc.
- Not being able to use essential services around health, finance, education and more.
- Not being able to exercise your digital rights.

## ***2. How well are existing UK media literacy initiatives working, and how could they be enhanced?***

5) At the moment, there is little funding which is short-term and goes into small organisations, and a lot of expectations that technology companies would provide the answers to the problems they create. However, moving forward it would be important to rely less on the good-will of tech companies who have so far not proven to have people's rights and wellbeing in mind. Countless academics, whistleblowers and investigating journalists have shown that many technology companies are driven by profit and less interested in the impact of their technologies and services on society. Therefore, relying on them to provide the answers is problematic, and should not be a priority. The main issue is that even if technology companies are introducing more people focused approaches, for example privacy and ethics committees, as recent cases show,<sup>6 7 8</sup> these are usually the first to go when there is an economic crisis or political changes. This shows that the more rights focused and wellbeing focused elements within the tech companies are not a top priority if they can be axed first. However, since many of the online harms are created by platforms and technology companies they should be taxed on these harms, and these could then be allocated by Ofcom to local media/digital/data literacy organisations. This 'online harms tax' has to be separate from the platforms and technology companies so that they do not influence how they are run and allocated. This is because oftentimes, projects that get funded by these platforms would not tend to criticise their conduct or empower people to challenge their conduct.

6) In our research around networks of literacy,<sup>9</sup> we show that local and contextual projects would make more sense to people and their communities. "*Networks of*

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<sup>6</sup> Benavidez, N. (2024). Big Tech Backslide. Free Press Report. Available at: <https://www.freepress.net/big-tech-backslide-how-social-media-rollbacks-endanger-democracy-ahead-2024-elections>

<sup>7</sup> (2025). Facebook and Instagram get rid of fact checkers. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cly74mpy8klo>

<sup>8</sup> Lorenz, T. (2025). YouTube removes 'gender identity' from hate speech policy.

User mag. Available at: <https://www.usermag.co/p/youtube-removes-gender-identity-from>

*Literacies*” which encompasses the ways people engage with others, where and with which media to gain digital understanding, skills and competencies in ways that fit them. Focusing on people’s *Networks of Literacies* enables us to understand people’s literacies beyond the individual and think about community and policy interventions that are tailored to people’s contextual experiences. We can see positive examples from organisations such as Citizens UK, who empower citizens from different communities to organise around issues that matter to them, and similarly teach them and give them tools to make changes in their local communities. Similar activities can be conducted around data literacies.

### **3. How will media literacy need to evolve over the next five years to keep up with changes in the media landscape and technological advancements?**

7) While many attempts to create impact focus on short-term ‘easy-wins’, it is important to focus on long-term ‘wins’. This is important because many times because of technology’s fast development policymakers are playing cat-and-mouse with technology, trying to chase the newest thing and shape it. Therefore, data literacy programmes should have a modular approach where there are basics from which people can build on, and update as technology develops. In the end, many critical literacy skills stay the same, so it is important not to be blinded by shiny new technologies each time they come out and be able to amend and ‘top-up’ current programmes.

8) As the government, and particularly DSIT, aim to drive innovation and boost public services, and recently invited technology experts, advocates and academics to shape the government’s new ‘digital centre’, it will be crucial to rely on reliable empirical data to make decisions in this area. Any public service that will use digital technology (that relies on data or AI), will have to take into consideration people’s different literacies levels, because, as my research from the past decade has shown, there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’. To ‘unlock the full potential of digital and data’ as the government argues, we have to understand what people’s literacies levels are so we can create better public services, education programmes, support mechanisms, and civic ways to engage with local and national government bodies to empower people and workers to be better citizens in a democratic society.

### **5. How adequately is the UK's regulatory and legislative framework delivering media literacy?**

9) On 7<sup>th</sup> of October Ofcom published their three-year media literacy strategy, outlining their three priorities: 1) Research, Evidence and Evaluation; 2) Engaging Platforms; 3) People and Partnerships. My comments about each of these priorities is as such:

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<sup>9</sup> Yates, S., & Carmi, E. (2022). Citizens’ networks of digital and data literacy. In *The Palgrave handbook of media misinformation*, edited by Fowler-Watt, K., and McDougall, J., (pp. 191-205). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

1. Research is important, but oftentimes Ofcom procures consultancy companies to conduct their research. While these can be fast and cheap, they are not always high quality and oftentimes they ignore the rich academic research that has already been conducted on media/data/AI literacy. At City St. George's University, for example, we have a rich understanding of data literacies, online harms and bullying and cybersecurity where academics from multiple fields work on these issues together as part of [the Centre for Online-Safety, Safeguarding, Privacy and Identity \(COSPI\)](https://researchcentres.citystgeorges.ac.uk/online-safety-safeguarding-privacy-and-identity).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, moving forward I suggest more collaborations with academics on conducting research around this issue. This could be done by setting up a network of academics across the UK who will meet with OfCom and the government and then decide how to allocate work to each specialised group.
2. While I appreciate that it is important to collaborate with platforms, as mentioned above, they have not proven themselves to put people's wellbeing and digital rights at the top of their priorities. Cases such as the algorithmic ordering that prioritises dis-/mis-/mal-information, along with deceptive implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation<sup>11</sup> (such as the consent mechanism)<sup>12</sup> and other deceptive practices<sup>13</sup> - all show that any collaboration with these platforms around media literacy and digital rights needs to be handled carefully.
3. The plan seems good, especially partnering with the Good Things Foundation. However, and as mentioned above, the key to reaching communities where they are is through libraries and upskilling librarians. This means providing additional funding to libraries and training programmes for librarians who can then tailor the literacy programmes for their communities. Libraries are one of the last free community spaces people have and people use them for multiple things. It is important to invest in them after years of defunding and closing down nearly a thousand libraries.<sup>14</sup>

## **7. What are the barriers and challenges to teaching media literacy to adults?**

- 10) The key barriers for adults to learn media literacy are:
1. Lack of time to participate in a literacy programme.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://researchcentres.citystgeorges.ac.uk/online-safety-safeguarding-privacy-and-identity>.

<sup>11</sup> Norwegian Ombudsman. (2018). Deceptive by Design: How Tech Companies Use Dark Patterns To Discourage Us From Exercising Our Rights to Privacy. Available at: <https://storage02.forbrukerradet.no/media/2018/06/2018-06-27-deceived-by-design-final.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Carmi, E. (2021, August). A feminist critique to digital consent. In *Seminar. net* (Vol. 17, No. 2). OsloMet-Oslo Metropolitan University. Available at: <https://journals.oslomet.no/index.php/seminar/article/view/4291>.

<sup>13</sup> Norwegian Ombudsman. (2022). Enough Deception: Norwegian Consumers' Experiences with Deceptive Design. Available at: <https://storage02.forbrukerradet.no/media/2022/11/report-enough-deception.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Flood, A. (2018). Britain Has Lost Almost 800 Libraries since 2010. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/06/britain-has-closed-almost-800-libraries-since-2010-figures-show>.

2. Language barriers.
3. Confidence barriers.
4. Culture, religion and class barriers.
5. Lack of spaces to learn, as children tend to learn media literacy at school, adults do not have institutions that they frequently go to in order to learn.
6. Depending on your socio-economic status - lack of appropriate devices and access to training.
7. Lack of context - oftentimes, adults need additional context to their own lives to be more involved. I discuss the way people feel that data harms are abstract and get interested in them only when they experience them firsthand in my report.<sup>15</sup>
8. Lack of ongoing support - even if adults learn an element of media literacy, where can they go for ongoing support?

11) This is the reason why libraries are so important and would need to be at the heart of any media literacy programme for adults. In the past decade hundreds of libraries have been closed and the ones who are still open suffer from lack of funding and resources. Libraries are essential for media literacy programmes for adults because they can support those citizens outside of formal education with more accessible free spaces where professionals can assist and support citizens to develop greater data literacy. Libraries would need more funding, and librarians would need to be upskilled in data and AI literacies to be able to provide ongoing media literacy teaching and support.

12) Together with Professor Simeon Yates from Liverpool University, we developed seven principles<sup>16</sup> for developing interventions to support citizens Data Literacy. These are starting points for thinking about interventions. The goal of the interventions has to be around empowering digital citizens with good Data Citizenship.

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<sup>15</sup> Carmi, E., & Nakou, P. (2023). What Mobilises People Against Big-Tech?. City St. George's report. Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/31373/7/2023%20report%20-%20what%20mobilises%20people%20against%20big%20tech.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Yates, S., & Carmi, E. (2024). Developing and Delivering and Data Literacy. In: *Digital Inclusion: International Research and Policy*, edited by Yates, S., and Carmi, E., (249-273). Springer Nature. Available at: [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-28930-9\\_12](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-28930-9_12)