

Shout Out UK—written evidence (FE00100)

House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee inquiry into Freedom of Expression Online

How should good digital citizenship be promoted? Does education help?

About Shout Out UK (SOUK)

Founded by Matteo Bergamini in 2015, SOUK was launched to fix the lack of political education in schools by bringing young people together to talk and learn about politics. Shout Out UK (SOUK) is now a multi-award winning education platform and creative social enterprise. Fusing education and tech with film production and animation ensures we create world-class programmes on Media & Political Literacy and high impact Democratic Engagement campaigns. Shout Out UK is on a mission to protect and amplify democracy by ensuring political and media literacy education is as widespread as possible, and available to all citizens in and out of school, regardless of their socio-economic background, ethnicity, or gender.

Introduction

The ongoing Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated two critical issues with UK politics - widespread depleting trust in democratic institutions and low levels of media literacy amongst the general public and young people. As the Bennett Institute for Public Policy found this year, the extent of global dissatisfaction with democracy is at its highest since records began (Foa et al: 2020).¹ The Edelman Trust Barometer² also reveals that in 2020 no major institution was viewed as both trustworthy and competent, and governments and the media were perceived to be neither. In addition, research by the Reuters Institute from May 2020³ determined that 48% of the British population "rated the government relatively trustworthy in late May, down from 67% six weeks earlier". The report also finds significant evidence for growing concerns over the spread of false or misleading information about the virus. With the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaring an 'infodemic'⁴ around the accelerated spread of Covid-19 misinformation, it has become even more vital to introduce effective interventions that break the vicious cycle of misinformation and depleting trust towards democratic institutions. Media and political literacy education is one of the most effective solutions to this.

¹ https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Youth_and_Satisfaction_with_Democracy_lite.pdf

² <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>

³ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/trust-uk-government-and-news-media-covid-19-information-down-concerns-over-misinformation>

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation>

What is media literacy education?

When talking about political literacy we refer to one's basic understanding of our fundamental political institutions, such as Parliament, government, local councils, etc. Understanding how these institutions function is an important prerequisite for effectively engaging with them and for leading positive change. Moreover, political education can help build trust, cooperation and networking skills, which in turn can help bridge divides in British society and can build social capital. In doing so, we ensure that the next generation consists of engaged citizens, who understand the value of democracy and ultimately restore the trust in our political institutions. Similarly, being media literate is rooted in critically evaluating the content of the information one consumes, recognising facts from opinions and knowing where and how to fact-check information before sharing it online. These skills are vital for responsible and good citizenship - it ensures that individuals' personal and political opinions are rooted in facts, as opposed to misinformed rhetoric and/or propaganda. Despite the significance and growing mass of evidence showcasing the positive effects of media and political literacy education, these two subjects are not actively taught as a part of the UK's formal education system. Yet, they are the most straightforward way of promoting good digital citizenship.

Shout Out UK's (SOUK) efforts

In order to promote good digital citizenship, we at SOUK have dedicated ourselves to teaching young people political and media literacy. Since 2015, we have delivered our Political Literacy programme to over **30,000 young people, aged 11-19 across the UK**. The programme teaches young people about the separation of powers, electoral systems; the role of Members of Parliament and the Prime Minister in upholding democracy, and introduces students to practical tools to engage with their local and national representatives. Its core aims are to not only strengthen young people's knowledge of politics, but to also inspire them to take action and enact changes within their local communities and beyond, both of which are essential elements of good citizenship. Below we have showcased some of the results we obtained from our Political Literacy programme from the past academic year, during which we engaged 906 young people:

Table 1: Impact of Political Literacy education

Question/Statement	Pre-survey results	Post-survey results
'I understand key British/local/international institutions'	38.5% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	88.3% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'
'I've learned enough about politics to make informed voting decisions'	30.3% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	82.6% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'
'I am confident to work with others to make positive changes to society'	14.8% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	88.4% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'

These results are indicative that learning about politics and the importance of taking part in democratic life helps equip young people with the skills needed to be active and engaged citizens. This knowledge ultimately translates into action and confidence and motivation for young people to collectively with others to foster positive changes to the world around them.

In addition to this, in April 2020, we worked with **130 young people across the UK**, engaging them in our Digital, Media Literacy and Journalism programme. The programme was launched in partnership with Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture and Sport as a part of Nesta’s **Future News Fund programme**, which aimed to bridge the gap between individuals and local journalism, as well as to build their trust towards public interest news. We worked specifically with young people in areas with low electoral participation levels and obtained the following results:

Table 2: Impact of Media Literacy education

Statement/Question	Pre-project survey results	Post-project survey results
'I believe local journalists would listen to what I have to say'	33.1% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	71.8% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'
'I feel confident to voice my opinions on the issues I care about'	36.2% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	91.5% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'
'If I wasn't sure a story was true, and I wanted to share it, I'd fact check it first'	36.9% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	89.4% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'

The pre and post-project survey results above provide us with an indication that media literacy education has been successful in meeting its expected outcomes - namely, to strengthen young people’s understanding that not all information they encounter online is factual and to incite them to fact-check the articles they read online, both of which underpin the realm of responsible digital citizenship. We are also happy to report that the project helped increase young people’s confidence to speak up on the issues they cared about, demonstrating that media literacy education’s benefits stretch beyond critical thinking and ability to fact-check information. This is another element of good digital citizenship, especially when combined with a strengthened understanding of the impacts of misinformation and disinformation. This means that young people have learned to exercise their freedom of expression, while being aware of the dangerous repercussions of spreading misinformation online.

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