

## **Emma Goodman and Professor Sonia Livingstone—written evidence (FOJ0066)**

### **House of Lords Select Committee on Communications and Digital Inquiry into the Future of Journalism**

#### **How can public policy improve media literacy, particularly among those who have a low level of digital literacy?**

We have argued in our LSE Truth, Trust and Technology report<sup>1</sup> and elsewhere that the government should mobilise an urgent, integrated new programme in media and digital literacy.

There is clear evidence that greater education for media literacy has a direct impact on improving people's ability to access and judge information.<sup>2</sup> With growing evidence of the damage in which misinformation and disinformation are involved, a new and increased commitment to media literacy is needed that addresses the context as well as the symptoms<sup>3</sup> – a media literacy that is fit for confronting the informational complexities that face citizens of the early 21st century.

A new programme needs to focus on both children in schools – for example, a compulsory media literacy module in citizenship classes – but also on adults in further and vocational education, as well as parents, teachers and the children's workforce. It is also essential to reach out to groups not in education or training and especially hard-to-reach groups.

Media literacy messages must be based on a reliable set of principles that are understood by news providers, educators and platforms, and they need to be implemented effectively and consistently over time in an unstable world. Ofcom's media literacy research enterprise should be tasked with developing an evaluation toolkit for all media literacy initiatives to use, and Ofcom should also publicise the results and draw out the lessons for future initiatives.

In schools, media literacy should be the fourth pillar of education alongside reading, writing and maths. The Department for Education should lead an inclusive educational framework to build digital literacy: at present, educational provision in UK schools is

---

<sup>1</sup> LSE Commission on Truth, Trust and Technology (2018) *Tackling the Information Crisis: A Policy Framework for Media System Resilience*, LSE, London. Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/truth-trust-and-technology-commission/The-report>

<sup>2</sup> Kim, E.-M. and Yang, S. (2016) *Internet literacy and digital natives' civic engagement: Internet skill literacy or internet information literacy?*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(4), 438–56. doi:10.1080/13676261.2015.1083961; Martens, H. and Hobbs, R. (2015) *How media literacy supports civic engagement in a digital age?* *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 23(2), 120–37. doi:10.1080/15456870.2014.961636; Hobbs, R. (2010) *Digital and media literacy: A plan of action*. Available at <http://mediaeducationlab.com/sites/mediaeducationlab.com/files/Hobbs%20Digital%20and%20Media%20Literacy%20Plan%20of%20Action.pdf>; Frau-Meigs, D. and Hibbard, L. (2016) *Education 3.0 and internet governance: A new global alliance for children and young people's sustainable digital development*, Paper Series no 27, Centre for International Governance Innovation and Chatham House. Available at [www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/gcig\\_no27web\\_0.pdf](http://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/gcig_no27web_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Jeong, S.H., Cho, H. and Hwang, Y. (2012) *Media literacy interventions: A meta-analytic review*, *Journal of Communication*, 62(3), 454–72. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01643.x.

insufficient for digital and media literacy, especially as regards critical literacy. This curricula effort across the UK needs to connect the areas where literacy is addressed, such as media studies, computer studies and citizenship.

As argued by LSE's Media Policy Project Brief #22, there are five pressing challenges faced by the current legislation, national curriculum and teaching resources:<sup>4</sup>

- Challenge no. 1: There is no clear framework on how to promote digital literacy
- Challenge no. 2: The Government thinks the national curriculum needs no revision, but it does.
- Challenge no. 3: The national curriculum falls short of teaching primary and secondary school children about the broader digital environment, and how to use their digital skills and knowledge to evaluate online information
- Challenge no. 4: Existing teaching resources focus more on media bias than online misinformation. As with the national curriculum, they do not encourage students to use their digital skills and knowledge to evaluate online content
- Challenge no. 5: Teachers need training

A new integrated programme in media literacy also needs to reach out to adults not in education or training. Both platforms and civil society organisations need to be incorporated into a programme that could include the provision and use of media literacy toolkits to integrate media literacy into wider social activism and services. An independent regulator or other body should coordinate work with the BBC and public service broadcasters, libraries, the National Literacy Trust and the tech platforms, ensuring that particular effort is made to target vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. It seems clear that with the demands on people's media literacy constantly outpacing what they can understand or keep up with, the media literacy gap will continue to grow unless substantial efforts are made.<sup>5</sup>

As Professor Sonia Livingstone has stressed, when embarking on any efforts to improve public understanding we should be mindful of the extent to which we 'responsibilise' the individual: the politics of media literacy risks not only burdening but also blaming the individual for the problems of our highly complex digital environment.<sup>6</sup>

Funding for a new programme could come from general taxation, philanthropy or via a portion of the platform levy. An independent body should assess and evaluate the platforms' role in promoting media literacy to highlight both good and bad practice. Oversight is needed to establish a baseline and minimal expectations of improvement for the whole population and those who are particularly low in media literacy.

---

<sup>4</sup> Polizzi, G., Taylor, R., (2019) *Misinformation, digital literacy and the school curriculum. Media Policy Brief 22*. London: Media Policy Project, London School of Economics and Political Science. Media Policy Project, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK. Available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101083/>

<sup>5</sup> Livingstone, S. (2008) *Engaging with media – A matter of literacy?*, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 1(1), 51–62. Available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/4264>

<sup>6</sup> Livingstone, S. (2018). *Media Literacy: what are the challenges and how can we move towards a solution?*. [Blog] *LSE Media Policy Project*. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2018/10/25/media-literacy-what-are-the-challenges-and-how-can-we-move-towards-a-solution/>

This body would track improvements through independent evaluations of initiatives to learn which work and why, and make recommendations as needed to bodies providing media literacy support. It would work with Ofcom or complementing Ofcom's research to ensure sufficient evidence on the public's critical news and information literacy.

April 2020