

Written evidence submitted by Shout Out UK (OSB0128)

“Are the media literacy duties given to Ofcom in the draft Bill sufficient?”

Shout Out UK (SOUK) would like to raise a response to the question “Are the media literacy duties given to Ofcom in the draft Bill sufficient?” in relation to the recently released draft Online Harms Bill and the Department for Culture, Media and Sports’ (DCMS) Media Literacy Strategy. We welcome parliamentarians’ and the government’s response to the growing levels of misinformation and disinformation; particularly, the priority of fostering a strong working relationship with the media literacy practitioners to ensure that young people receive appropriate and fit-for-purpose media literacy education. This will foster not only healthier habits and attitudes when navigating the online world, but will also transform how young people build relationships with their peers both online and offline.

It is encouraging to see that the draft Bill and DCMS’ Media Literacy Strategy have assigned Ofcom greater media literacy duties; specifically around collaborating with civil society organisations to deliver educational programmes and other initiatives on the topic of media literacy, and ‘supporting and encouraging the evaluation of media literacy initiatives, including service design choices and educational programmes’¹. Despite this clarification in Ofcom’s media literacy duties, a key question concerning Ofcom’s responsibilities remains to be answered and covered by the draft Bill:

- *What relationship and coordination, if any, will Ofcom have with the Home Office, the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted around the implementation of the Prevent Duty in schools, colleges and universities, as well as any other counter extremism initiatives?*

We raise this question in our capacity as a civil society organisation that delivers counter-extremism and online radicalisation educational projects by utilising a media literacy framework for young people aged 11-19 in schools and colleges. Our Extremism and Media Literacy programme prioritises young people’s ability to recognise and tackle far-right extremist rhetoric via critical thinking abilities, source analysis skills and emotional resilience - key elements within media literacy. Furthermore, we aim to strengthen students’ understanding of traditional and social media, what role these play in forming one’s own views of themselves, their peers and the wider world around them, as well as how sometimes these online spaces become saturated with disinformation and conspiracy theories with malign intentions - phenomena that pose a significant risk to those most vulnerable’s wellbeing. Through debates, discussions, questioning, enquiry and collaboration, we strive to build healthy lifelong online information consumption habits amongst our students and, in doing so, to ensure that they can safely navigate the internet, without falling victims to extremism and radicalisation.

The results of this approach are evident - between September 2020 and March 2021, we delivered the Extremism and Media Literacy programme to 530 young people aged 14-19

¹ DCMS (2021), ‘Online Media Literacy Strategy’
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1004233/DCMS_Media_Literacy_Report_Roll_Out_Accessible_PDF.pdf, p.98

across two London boroughs in state schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Utilising pre and post-programme evaluation forms, the following results were obtained:

STATEMENT	PRE-PROGRAMME	POST-PROGRAMME
'I know how to identify a conspiracy theory'	<i>45.76% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement</i>	<i>71.43% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement</i>
'I would seek out views and opinions that differ from my own'	<i>38.26% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement</i>	<i>56.00% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement</i>
'I can identify extremist views online'	<i>48.16% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement</i>	<i>70.52% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement</i>

It is also important to note that, the SOUK team invested a significant amount of time building relationships with teachers and SLTs, in order to ensure that the participants receive a programme of the highest quality. In doing so, we also discovered that one of the most effective ways to introduce media literacy interventions at schools is by positioning the topic within schools' responsibilities to cover the Prevent Duty and how it helps them safeguard their students against online radicalisation and extremism.

In light of this, on a high policy, macro level, we believe that it is vital to consider how Ofcom's greater media literacy duties will fit within the government's counter-extremism priorities. A clarification of the potential symbiosis between Ofcom's duties, the Home Office and the DfE will be necessary, in order to provide schools, external education providers and other civil society organisations with information on how best to deliver interventions that tackle both low levels of media literacy and safeguard young people against extremism and online radicalisation.

On an implementation, micro-level, the focus should shift towards building trust amongst teachers, in order to ensure that Ofcom's promotion of additional educational initiatives does not result in teachers feeling burned out and overloaded, especially, in a post-Covid-19 context, with many educators focussing on catching up and exam preparation. One way this gap can be bridged is by leaning on the expertise of civil society organisations that specialise in media literacy interventions in school contexts and have long-standing relationships and networks with teachers. By assuming the responsibility of working together with formal education institutions, with the support of civil society, Ofcom will be in a better position to ensure that as many vulnerable young people at schools as possible have access to and receive effective media literacy education.

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.

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