Department for
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& Technology

Cross-sectoral challenges to media literacy

Final Report

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Executive summary

This research was commissioned by the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT - formerly DCMS) in October 2022, as part of its efforts to address challenges, barriers and inefficiencies in the media literacy sector, and build capabilities in organisations to meet the ambition of the Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS, 2021a). The research objectives were:

1) To develop an accurate picture of the challenges the media literacy sector faces in relation to coordination, funding, evaluation and any other key challenges that emerge through the research.
2) To gain insights from a rigorous comparison of other international contexts and identify the lessons that the government can learn from their approaches to media literacy.
3) To identify policy opportunities for intervention from government and other actors to improve the UK media literacy landscape. In particular, DSIT are seeking opportunities that are tangible, and feasible to implement over the next 1-5 years.

The study was framed in relation to Ofcom's definition of media literacy as "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts", and the five principles of media literacy set out in the Online Media Literacy Strategy: Data and Privacy; Online Environment; Information Consumption; Online Consequences; and Online Engagement.

The research was a stakeholder-centric, in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by the UK media literacy sector, based on engagement with organisations and individuals in the media literacy and adjacent sectors, particularly grant making bodies and funders. The findings reflect the views of stakeholders based on their deep knowledge and experience of the sector and its operation across a range of settings. They do not constitute an evaluation of cause and effect, or a quantitative assessment of the challenges they identified.

Stakeholders were defined as organisations or individuals who were delivering, funding, or researching interventions that addressed media, information, and digital literacy. Potential participants were identified using desk research, including a review of the membership of Ofcom's Making Sense of Media network, and of the list of providers of online safety and digital media literacy identified in the DCMS Mapping Exercise and Literature Review (DCMS, 2021b). The stakeholders included NGOs, sector and trade associations, charities, news media and technology companies, as well as funders and academics[1]. Five different data collection methods were used: stakeholder workshops, individual interviews with six funders of media literacy initiatives; an academic roundtable; 11 comparative international case analyses; and a quantitative survey.

The findings across all methods indicated a large degree of consistency in relation to stakeholder perceptions of the challenges faced by the sector, as well as the opportunities for change that could be most productive[2].

Challenges

The Online Media Literacy Strategy identifies six types of challenge for the sector (evaluation, funding, hard-to-reach audiences, vulnerable users, building resilience to mis/disinformation; and coordination). Many of these were reflected in the research findings, but a thematic analysis of the stakeholder contributions across the different data collection methods also revealed new categories of challenges. The categories revealed through the analysis are:

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[1] *Government stakeholders were not included in the participants, since this was beyond the scope of the research. This report does not represent their views, only those of the participants we spoke to.*

[2] *Some stakeholders raised a number of observations and suggestions about the different ways the government could support the media literacy sector and suggested further research into ideas to bolster the work of the educational sector. However, these suggestions have not been included in this final report as they require much more detailed consideration and scrutiny than has been possible in this research project.*

- The **media environment**, particularly the need to keep up with rapidly changing technologies and media habits, the opacity of digital infrastructures and technologies that made understanding the media environment more difficult, and the tensions created by the role of platforms as the cause of many problems being addressed by media literacy, but also important funders of media literacy interventions.
- **Definitions and framing of media literacy**, particularly the emphasis on online harm, which could deter people from going online.
- **Low levels of media literacy in general and low awareness of its importance**.
- **Low levels of institutional trust**, including in the media.
- **Sector structure and coordination**, including a lack of strategic direction, fragmented practices, a lack of visibility of practices across the sector, and associated problems with sharing best practice, scaling up activity and quality assurance.
- **Funding challenges**, including an emphasis on short-term, small-scale projects that made both comparative analyses of practice and scaling up initiatives more difficult.
- **Quality-related issues**, including a lack of benchmarks or frameworks against which interventions could be designed and evaluated, no quality assurance across the sector, and no systematic sharing of best practice.
- **Providing for hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences**, particularly the need to make media literacy relevant to them, and tailoring it to their needs and circumstances, given the other, more urgent priorities they faced.
- **Low levels of skill and expertise in evaluation**, and varied evaluation practices across the sector, both of which limited comparability of projects and validity of results.
- **Evaluating long-term and societal level outcomes**, particularly the difficulty accessing data and participants over time, as well as defining and isolating variables to be measured.
- Difficulties **accessing proprietary data** for evaluation.

The analysis also revealed close links between the different challenges. For example, funding challenges were linked to sector structure because small-scale, short-term projects produced fragmentation. While these links make the challenges more complex, they also suggest that a strategic approach to identifying policy opportunities, identifying those that could generate multiple benefits across different challenges, could be productive.

Opportunities to improve the UK media literacy landscape

In response to the challenges, and as part of the survey, stakeholders were asked to rank a series of potential opportunities for the sector that they had raised in the qualitative workshops and interviews. These were categorised into the areas of funding, evaluation, sector coordination, governance, delivery and platforms.

Choices about what measures to implement as the Online Media Literacy Strategy evolves are necessarily dependent on a wide range of factors. This ranking was conducted as an indicative exercise only, to identify which opportunities stakeholders commonly recognised as potentially most useful, and the choices do not reflect the outcomes of the evidence-based approach the government takes when developing policy. The following opportunities attracted the most agreement.

- Funding: Create a fund for media literacy via industry sources.
- Evaluation: Define best practice evaluation approaches for programmes and outcomes.
- Sector coordination: Create a convening space for the sector to come together.
- Delivery: Outside the school environment, embed media literacy in services people already use.

Aside from these items, the other highly ranked opportunities reflected many of the most critical challenges identified in the research.

- Funding opportunities focused on ensuring funding is reliable and visible to sector actors.

- In evaluation, a better basis for evaluation, and more research, were prioritised.
- Coordination opportunities prioritised ways to improve connections within the sector.
- In governance, priorities focused on the ways in which media literacy could be formally recognised as a skillset with broad relevance.
- For delivery, the focus was on both using and improving the infrastructures on which delivery depends.
- For platforms, the need for government to enforce responsibility and openness was highlighted.

Introduction

This research was commissioned by the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT - formerly DCMS) in October 2022, as part of its efforts to address challenges, barriers and inefficiencies in the media literacy sector, and build capabilities in organisations to meet the ambition of the Online Media Literacy Strategy (DCMS, 2021a). The research objectives were:

1) To develop an accurate picture of the challenges the media literacy sector faces in relation to coordination, funding, evaluation and any other key challenges that emerge through the research.
2) To gain insights from a rigorous comparison of other international contexts and identify the lessons that the government and the media literacy community can learn from their approaches to media literacy.
3) To identify opportunities for intervention from government and other actors to improve the UK media literacy landscape. In particular, DSIT are seeking opportunities that are tangible, and feasible to implement over the next 1-5 years.

The study was framed in relation to Ofcom's definition of media literacy as "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts", and the five principles of media literacy set out in the Online Media Literacy Strategy: Data and Privacy; Online Environment; Information Consumption; Online Consequences; and Online Engagement.

The research was designed as a stakeholder-centric, in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by the UK media literacy sector, using the challenges set out in the Online Media Literacy Strategy as a starting point (evaluation, funding, reaching vulnerable and hard-to-reach[3] audiences, resilience to mis/disinformation, coordination across the sector). Stakeholders were defined as organisations or individuals who were delivering, funding or researching interventions that addressed media, information and/or digital literacy.

Potential participants were identified using desk research, including a review of the membership of Ofcom's Making Sense of Media network, and the list of providers of online safety and digital media literacy identified in the DCMS Mapping Exercise and Literature Review (2021b). A total of 69 organisations were identified for the qualitative research and invited to participate. The final group of participants included NGOs, sector and trade associations, charities, news media and technology companies (defined here as 'practitioner stakeholders' because they were implementing media literacy initiatives), as well as funders and academics.

The methodology was designed in line with the principles of good consultation, and aimed to be:

- Inclusive - ensuring all those who have a stake in the delivery of media literacy and interests in its benefits are consulted, within the parameters of the brief.
- Well-informed - ensuring robust, wide-ranging and rigorous evidence is gathered, and that the stakeholders involved are able to reflect on views different from their own, in order to develop thoughtful contributions and mutual understanding.
- Balanced - ensuring that the recommendations are a reflection of the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders involved, and that an adequate compromise is reached between those interests and perspectives, where necessary.
- Accountable - ensuring that stakeholders are fully informed about the consultation process, the ways in which their information will be used, and have the opportunity to ask questions about the process and outcomes of the consultation, should they wish to.

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[3] *The participants in the study felt that a more accurate term to describe these audiences was 'neglected'. They also argued that media literacy is 'hard-to-reach' for audiences, and not the other way round (see also Bucci et al., 2019). For the purposes of consistency with the Online Media Literacy Strategy, we use the term hard-to-reach audiences in this report.*

Five different data collection methods were used[4]: stakeholder workshops with practitioner stakeholders, individual interviews with 6 funders of media literacy interventions; a roundtable discussion with 8 academic experts on media literacy; 11 comparative international case analyses; and a quantitative survey of practitioner stakeholders.

The research was designed to gather detailed information about the challenges to the sector, based on perceptions of stakeholders working in media literacy, along with the views of UK-based academics and incorporating insights from case studies of other countries. A survey was conducted as part of the research and provided confirmation of the qualitative data among a wider group of stakeholders (see below). However, the lack of a definitive mapping of the sector, and the randomised survey design, meant that the representativity of different parts of the sector among the survey respondents could not be confirmed. Hence, the findings in this report provide deep insight into how stakeholders perceive the challenges and opportunities for media literacy in the UK, but any decisions on how they might translate into future action would need further analysis, including consultation with a wider range of stakeholders, as well as the policymaking community.

Stakeholder workshops

Two stakeholder workshops (one full-day in-person event and one 2-hour online session) were held in November and December 2022, with a total of 34 stakeholders from a range of organisations active in the UK media literacy landscape. The organisations included NGOs, sector and trade associations, charities, news media and technology companies.

The in-person workshop was divided into four sessions tackling 1) societal, 2) structural and 3) practice-based challenges, and 4) opportunities for the sector that could address the challenges. Topics covered in the first three sessions included the six challenges identified in the Online Media Literacy Strategy, while the fourth session was left open for stakeholders to propose ideas based on what they felt was most important. Stakeholders were broken up into five small groups for each of the sessions, and a moderator guided their progress and took notes. The online workshop was held to accommodate stakeholders who were unable to attend the in-person workshop. It was a more condensed discussion of the challenges and opportunities, but also included moderated breakout rooms. In both workshops, plenary discussions were held at the end of each session, where the groups shared their insights with all other participants.[5]

Funder interviews

Six individual interviews were held with funders in January 2023. The interviews were 30-60 minutes long and focused on funders' perspectives of the funding landscape for media literacy in the UK, the models they applied for their funding practice, and any innovations or changes that they felt could improve funding practices.

Academic discussion

We held a one-hour online 'roundtable' discussion with eight UK-based academic experts in January 2023. The discussion gathered participants' reflections on the findings from the workshops and asked them for any additional insights into the points made, based on their research and expertise. The discussion ensured that existing academic expertise on media literacy was incorporated into the research. Participants were provided with a summary of the workshop findings in advance, and their reflections were incorporated into the overall analysis.

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[4] *For a full description of the methods, see Appendix 1: Technical Annex.*

[5] *Three additional interviews were carried out with stakeholders who could not attend either session. but were keen to participate.*

Survey

A survey was distributed to the wider media literacy sector, to confirm whether the findings from the qualitative discussions were valid across the sector as a whole.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of challenges, including those relating to sector context, sector coordination, funding, evaluation, and delivery to hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences. They were then asked to rank opportunities relating to sector coordination, funding, evaluation, governance, delivery, and the role of platforms. The survey questions were based on the most important challenges / opportunities identified through the analysis of the workshops and interviews.

The survey was distributed to 128 organisations, identified through the workshop participants, Ofcom's library of media literacy initiatives, and DSIT contacts. Forty-five responses were received from a range of organisation types, a response rate of 35%. Non-profit organisations and charities made up just over half the sample, with the remaining respondents spread across a range of organisation types. Six responses were incomplete and responses per question therefore varied between 39 (minimum) and 43.[6]

Table 1: Survey respondent breakdown

Organisation type	Count
Non-profit / charity organisation	26
Educational institution	6
Media company	3
International organisation	2
Local authority	1
Social enterprise	1
Other private sector organisation	3
Other public sector organisation	2
Prefer not to say	1
Total	45

Case studies

Eleven international case comparisons were conducted from February to April 2023, to identify lessons for the UK based on the approaches taken to media literacy in other countries. Cases were selected for analysis based on one or more of the following factors:

- A strong tradition of media literacy training within or outside formal education (e.g., Canada, Finland, France, Sweden).
- Similarities to the UK context in terms of one or more of the following:
  - Demography (e.g., France)
  - Intellectual framing of media literacy (e.g., Canada, New Zealand)
  - Challenges (e.g., Belgium, Estonia, Ireland)
  - Proximity in terms of geography and governance (Ireland).

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[6] *Questions were presented in a random order, and so no single question was answered by all 45 participants.*

- High level of digital skills and digital literacy (e.g., Finland, the Netherlands).
- A global spread beyond Europe (e.g., Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa).

Case studies were categorised as **in-depth** (Canada, France, The Netherlands); **medium** (Belgium (Flanders), Finland, Ireland) or **short** (Brazil, Estonia, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden). For all case studies, we conducted extensive desk research in our review of policies, reports, scholarly publications, periodicals, and website entries. The medium-length case studies were also based on an interview with at least one media literacy stakeholder, and for the in-depth case studies we conducted at least three interviews.

Analysis of the data from each method was summarised in interim reports. This final report includes a summary of all findings.

Government initiatives since the launch of the Online Media Literacy Strategy

The findings of this research reflect stakeholders' current experiences of the sector. However, it is important to note that since the Online Media Literacy Strategy was launched, the government has initiated changes that begin to address some of the concerns expressed. For example, the Year 2 Online Media Literacy Action Plan (DCMS 2022) expands the government's media literacy programme and allocates £2m of funding to continue supporting the sector.

Two grant schemes have been set up, the Programme Fund and the Taskforce Fund; critically, these schemes place an emphasis on robust evaluation of funded projects, to establish 'what works'. Findings from these evaluations will be shared across the sector to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of media literacy initiatives in future, and will inform the government's policymaking in this area. The government is providing just over £1.6m to the Programme Fund across two years, to fund 13 media literacy projects focused on tackling the challenges of evaluation, reaching vulnerable users, and building resilience to mis- and disinformation.

A Media Literacy Taskforce was also set up by the government to formulate ways to extend the provision of media literacy to hard-to-reach citizens. Their remit includes supporting organisations to pilot new methods of delivering media literacy to hard-to-reach citizens through local communities, and to scrutinise Taskforce Fund bids before funding is awarded. In addition to the two grant schemes, the government is also funding two research projects, this one and a second focusing on how to engage hard-to-reach citizens.

The stakeholder feedback reinforces the importance of these measures by underlining the challenges they are designed to address. While some stakeholders did note and welcome the new government funding, more extensive comments on these efforts may be absent simply because the measures being implemented will take time to generate change (for example, through projects delivering new models of evaluation). The positive impact of government measures is therefore unlikely to be fully evident as yet.

Current research on cross-sectoral challenges for media literacy

A wide range of industry and academic research has been conducted on the topic of media literacy, but research on the challenges facing the sector is somewhat more limited. Perhaps most fundamentally, research shows that the definition of media literacy remains both broad and fluid. A recent rapid evidence assessment of online misinformation and media literacy research (Edwards et al., 2021) identified a range of ways in which media literacy was both defined and applied in research and practice: critical thinking, credibility verification, media competence development, digital literacy, cross-context literacy, systemic approaches to media literacy, and media literacy as a form of empowerment. McDougall (2019a) notes that the definitions of media literacy remain problematic, but there has been a call to shift media literacy interventions more towards critical, creative, and aesthetic elements.

This variety means that the idea of a media literacy 'sector' is difficult to define, because there are so many entry points for interventions to take place. Some stakeholders in this research, for example, argued that media literacy initiatives could and perhaps should be delivered by a range of organisations, given that media literacy is relevant to so many different areas of life and needs to be made relevant (particularly for adults, hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups) in the context of other activities. Our findings should be understood in relation to this fluidity around the idea of a 'sector' that stakeholders could readily identify with media literacy.

Below we summarise recent academic findings relating to the key challenges facing the media literacy sector identified in the Online Media Literacy Strategy, which were the starting point for this research. It is important to note that academic research itself is unevenly distributed, and the areas of funding and sector coordination are significantly under-investigated (although research conducted by public bodies does contribute to filling some of these gaps).

The results set out in this report should be read in relation to the findings below; in many cases our participants' contributions reinforce issues identified in existing research, but they also add depth and qualitative insight to what is already known. Moreover, they offer an understanding of stakeholder perspectives of media literacy, which has only received limited attention in previous work, and thus make an important contribution to existing knowledge about media literacy in practice.

Evaluation

A number of studies have identified challenges associated with the evaluation of media literacy. The Online Media Literacy Strategy highlights knowledge gaps relating to evaluation and effectiveness, including in relation to platform-design interventions and vulnerabilities to disinformation, and a reliance on simple metrics that do not measure more complex effects of media literacy. The range of interpretations of media literacy mean that potential measures of effectiveness are many and varied, making a standardised approach difficult to realise (Bulger and Davison, 2018). The research reviewed by Edwards et al. (2021) echoes this, noting problems associated with measuring long term evaluation, a lack of randomised controlled studies, a dependence on self-reporting, subjective interpretations of results, and difficulties identifying and measuring specific effects (Jones-Jang et al., 2021; Encheva et al., 2020; Bulger and Davison, 2018; Schilder et al., 2016). For practitioners, evaluation is problematic because outcomes are often poorly defined, assessments are context-specific, and they also fail to address higher-order changes in behaviour (e.g., critical thinking) (Schilder et al., 2016). Ofcom (2022) also identified a range of issues relating to evaluation, including a lack of funding, a misalignment of funding cycles with evaluation timing, variable definitions of impact, low response rates to evaluative surveys, the online and ad-hoc nature of media literacy, and the pace of change in the digital sphere.

The current lack of evaluation makes delivering sound media literacy initiatives problematic (Livingstone,

2022), and there is a clear need for research that employs a variety of methods to study not just the impact of interventions, but also behaviour change in the population over time. All these concerns were reflected in our participants' discussions as well as in the case study findings, suggesting that evaluation should remain a key focus for efforts to improve media literacy delivery in the future.

Funding

A small amount of research suggests that funding remains a major challenge facing the sector. Wallis and Buckingham (2019) observe that since the initial introduction of Ofcom's duty to promote media literacy in 2003, funding for implementing initiatives has gradually declined, and contemporary industry and academic findings reinforce the need for more and longer-term funding sources for media literacy programmes. The Online Media Literacy Strategy notes that funding challenges relate to the short-term and unstable nature of funding, and the reliance on multiple funding sources for individual initiatives. Kanižaj (2017) confirms the volume of media literacy done by civil society organisations across Europe, but notes that independence from state funding also brings with it pressures to find funding from elsewhere. The DCMS Media Literacy Evidence Review (DCMS, 2021b) shows that funding sources were fragmented: the most commonly reported sources of funding were internal resources (reported by 13% of all initiatives) and government funding (reported by 13% of all initiatives), followed closely by private sector companies (11% of all initiatives), although the latter tend to be focused on funding for projects related to their specific sector (McDougall et al., 2021).

Engaging with vulnerable and hard-to-reach audiences

Some research has identified challenges around engaging hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences, although these groups are under-researched as compared to studies of school-based interventions. Rasi, Vuojärvi and Rivinen (2021), for example, conducted a systematic review of published research on media literacy interventions for the over-60s, and found that scant research exists addressing media literacy rather than media practices or use, although the latter does indicate different types of engagement among older people as compared to younger groups, suggesting that media literacy needs will differ. Where outcomes were reported, they focused on individualised learning, skills development, and inclusion, rather than critical thinking and evaluation skills or citizenship.

Some studies indicate that a needs-based and peer-to-peer approach to pedagogy would be the most effective, fostering a sense of self-efficacy in relation to digital media. McDougall, Fowler-Watt and Edwards (2021) observe that the COVID-19 pandemic has produced a body of work engaging with more creative analyses of how media literacy might be supported via innovative and creative media such as comics, play formats, and storytelling, but note that the results of these interventions are still to be confirmed. Similarly, Austin, Borah and Domgaard (2021) found that media literacy could help Black communities address misinformation related to COVID-19 but did not analyse the effectiveness of interventions. An Ofcom study (2023a) on mental health and media literacy found that good media literacy can and does support mental health, and that the most helpful approaches are led by the needs of the user.

More broadly, Mihailidis et al. (2021) question the assumption that media literacy interventions with marginalised communities are inclusive, citing the potential disconnect between programmes that assume individual media engagement will enhance citizenship, in the context of persistent inequalities, including relating to media access. Williams et al. (2016) emphasise the challenge of engaging these users in media literacy, given their lack of interest and ability to be digitally connected, and Bucci et al. (2019) argue that framing users as hard-to-reach is misplaced, and that instead, interventions should be easier to access. Livingstone (2022) has called for media literacy to be more targeted, recognising the specific needs of different audiences, but the limited existing research in this area suggests that more needs to be done.

The stakeholders in this study confirmed some of these findings, in particular recognising the need to tailor and deliver media literacy interventions in ways that accommodate the complex lives of groups that are neglected in current provision.

Resilience to mis- and disinformation

Reducing vulnerability to mis- and disinformation are a particular focus for digital media literacy interventions, because of the ways in which the digital environment has been accompanied by reduced trust in media and increased exposure to potential harm (Community Security Trust, 2022; Internet Watch Foundation, 2022; Newman 2022; Carmi et al., 2020; Waisbord, 2018; Nowotny, 2017). Concerns about resilience in a digital era are not new (Potter, 2004; Livingstone, 2003), but research on the intersection between media literacy interventions and resilience to mis- and disinformation remains partial and limited, particularly in relation to actual evidence of effectiveness (Edwards et al., 2021).

A number of researchers argue that fostering critical thinking in the longer term would be more successful than short-term, skills-based approaches (McDougall, 2019b), while others have emphasised the need to teach citizens how and why information disorders happen, including an understanding of the infrastructures of the contemporary online media environment and its effects on media experiences (Cannon et al., 2022; Carmi et al., 2020). Research analysed by Edwards et al. (2021) suggests that media literacy in the digital era needs to reflect the dynamic, multimedia environment, blending offline and online approaches and using visual and interactive modes that appeal to emotional triggers as well as text-based exercises focused on rational argument (Encheva et al., 2020; Currie Sivek, 2018; Johnson, 2018; Kheak Hui & Liew, 2018).

In this research, stakeholders echoed these concerns, emphasising the challenges associated with keeping up with the evolving digital environment, and providing training that aligned with the ways digital media is currently used by children and adults.

Sector coordination

Media literacy is a cross-sectoral activity, because of its relevance to a wide range of social, cultural and economic activities (Palsa and Salomaa, 2020). Civil society organisations are major stakeholders, encompassing different organisation types, but the public sector and, increasingly, private sector actors are important contributors (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016). In the UK, the DCMS Media Literacy Evidence Review (2020b) confirmed this pattern, with over 170 media literacy-related initiatives delivered in 2019 by civil society groups, online platforms, media houses, universities, corporations, and government bodies.

This variety notwithstanding, very little academic research has focused on the challenges presented by such a diverse set of actors for coordination, other than a small number of studies observing that more coordination between actors could enhance the effectiveness of media literacy interventions (Kanižaj, 2017). Bulger and Davison (2018) argue in the context of the United States that a national body could track media literacy interventions and disseminate research. They suggest that Ofcom serves as a "productive example" of what such a body could look like. Policy approaches are more explicit about the need to coordinate media literacy efforts (e.g., Be Media Smart in Ireland, Finland's National Media Education policy). The government's Online Media Literacy Strategy also notes that a wide range of organisations play distinct roles in the media literacy landscape, and coordination is an important challenge. Limited coordination leads to duplication and a lack of oversight, as well as a fragmentation of the sector's efforts. In addition, skill levels are difficult to standardise and monitor, while the volume of provision may be confusing and off-putting for users (DCMS, 2021a).

The stakeholders echoed some of these sentiments but added to them by emphasising that a more coordinated sector would also enhance sharing of best practices, visibility of funding opportunities, and provide a space for the sector to convene and connect.

Sector Challenges

In this section, we set out the challenges that were consistently identified across the different data sets. We also identify challenges that were important in specific contexts[7]. Quotes from the workshop discussions (in red), funder interviews (in grey) and case studies (in green) are used to illustrate the points made.

Sector challenges were identified in different ways at each stage of the project:

- In the workshops, stakeholders were asked to discuss the challenges associated with the wider social, political or technological context; with the characteristics of the sector; and with the ways media literacy initiatives are delivered.
- In the funder interviews, funders were asked to identify the most important challenges that they observed in the sector.
- In the international case study interviews, participants were asked to identify the most important challenges they faced in their own context. Challenges were also identified via the desk research conducted for each case.
- In the survey, participants were asked to evaluate the importance of challenges categorised into seven areas. These challenges had been identified in the workshop discussions and funder interviews as important issues, and the survey allowed us to ascertain the relative importance of each.

Participants were aware of the broader trends in the media and information landscape that affect media literacy delivery (see, e.g. Newman et al., 2023), including the rapid expansion of mis- and disinformation, changes in media use, changing news habits including a reduced role for legacy media as people turn to social media as their primary news sources, a rise in populism and lower levels of trust in social, political and media institutions. These factors contributed to the participants' sense that addressing media literacy needs is more urgent than ever before, and that an opportunity exists for the sector to demand more recognition and resources as a potentially important contributor to the efforts to meet some of these broader challenges. This orientation is reflected in the challenges and opportunities discussed below.

We group the challenges into three overarching categories: contextual, delivery and evaluation challenges, although they do overlap in practice.

Contextual challenges[8]

Contextual challenges relate to the complexities of the media literacy environment, definitions of media literacy, and the support that exists for the sector. We identified the following sub-challenges in this overarching category.

The media and digital environment

The technological environment was recognised as a challenge on a number of levels. First, the workshop participants noted that the fast pace of change was challenging when considering how to use technology effectively in media literacy education.

Second, they observed that the age-related restrictions on children's use of different platforms and the opacity of platform infrastructures could both limit participants' engagement with important questions about media and how it works when delivering media literacy interventions. Stakeholder 19, for instance, said in relation to age

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[7] *Some stakeholders raised a number of suggestions about the different ways the government could support the media literacy sector and suggested further research into ideas to bolster the work of the educational sector. However, these high-level suggestions have not been included in this final report as they require much more detailed consideration and scrutiny than has been possible in this project.*

[8] *We use the workshop categorisation of challenges into those associated with context, delivery and evaluation of media literacy initiatives, to make this section easier for the reader to navigate.*

restrictions: "For us, the challenge is, we can't directly acknowledge the fact that they (children) are on these platforms, because legally, they're not supposed to be...even though they probably are already on it". While there was no obvious work-around for this situation, it nonetheless presented challenges for teaching media literacy effectively.

The opacity of platform infrastructures also presented problems, as the following quote illustrates:

> There's also unfortunately, a [limited] extent to which the public and every single user can be really digitally literate, because issues of transparency are linked with how corporations operate, which make it inherently impossible for us to understand certain things. Because yes, we know that the algorithms work in a certain way, but we don't really know the full story. […] how can you construct, how can you build certain avenues to develop certain knowledge when you're not even given the instruments?
>
> *Stakeholder 13*

Third, some participants highlighted the tensions raised by platforms' dual role in providing services where harmful activity takes place, and as important funders for media literacy. Without any obvious changes to their business models that might mitigate their harmful effects, participants expressed concern about the motivations that underpinned platforms' media literacy activities.

> [Platforms] have published their own data and research about the fact that…people are more likely to like and comment out of outrage [on inflammatory and harmful content]. And now all the reactions and their algorithms are weighting these things as more valuable, and they make money by keeping you there… So it's like, how do you divorce their good intentions from what's actually funding them – their financial model?
>
> *Stakeholder 4*

In the international case studies, interviewees mentioned similar concerns, and some highlighted the difficulties that they face when making decisions about whether or not to work with platforms (e.g., in France, Netherlands, Ireland). The survey results reflected these concerns through a clustering of challenges associated with the technological environment at the higher end of the importance rating scale.

Framing, definitions, and the public profile of media literacy

Stakeholder discussions revealed a general feeling that media literacy in the UK was approached primarily through the lens of potential harm, rather than opportunity, which in their view runs the risk of minimising the importance of wider societal benefits of media literacy (e.g., critical thinking, creativity, democratic engagement and participation).

> [the Online Media Literacy Strategy] is framed very, very largely in those defensive terms. It doesn't really talk enough about empowerment, about what we're talking about is important for participation and democracy and civics and all those things.
>
> *Stakeholder 22*

The emphasis on harm was perceived to be potentially off-putting for some users, potentially reducing media use rather than improving the ways it was used.

> this element around misinformation and disinformation can often result in people withdrawing completely […] And it's that balance of trying to keep people engaged with [an] online world which ultimately benefits them.
>
> *Stakeholder 16*

Participants also felt there was a generally low level of media literacy in society, and low awareness of its importance. This was compounded by the fact that media literacy itself was difficult to define, which had knock-on effects on understanding who was delivering it, the comparability of activity across the sector, and the quality of evaluation. Low levels of institutional trust were also seen to affect attitudes to media, which affected the perceived value of media literacy among the public.

In the case studies, similar concerns were voiced by academics and civil society in countries where tackling online harms and / or disinformation was a major focus of media literacy (e.g., in New Zealand, France). Conversely, when media literacy was defined in broader terms (e.g., in Finland, Sweden), it was noted as an advantage because it permitted a more extensive engagement with media to include creative work and use of media literacy skills across other areas of life (e.g., health, finance). In the survey, such concerns were reflected in the high ranking of the opportunity to reframe media literacy in a more positive, empowering way.

Sector coordination[9]

A perceived lack of sector coordination leads to a number of different challenges, according to workshop participants.

First, the lack of visibility across the sector meant that it was difficult to know what was being done, by whom, and with what effect. This meant that duplication and gaps in provision were difficult to identify, suggesting that already scarce resources were unlikely to be used in the best way. In addition, practitioners could not learn from each other or build on best practices in either delivery or evaluation. There was a corresponding concern about the variable quality of programmes, in the absence of a quality control system or benchmark to define required/desirable outcomes.

> I see a lot of reinventing the wheel piloting the same models. And I'm in so many conversations where people call me and they go, Oh, we're thinking of setting this up. And I go, Well, we've been doing that for the last... we have 10 evaluations on it, here's a guide on how to deliver them. But everyone's doing the same thing. And that's why I think the focus really needs to be on that shared learning.
>
> *Stakeholder 21*

Participants also felt there was no strategic approach to the sector, or long-term vision for its development and contribution. The short-term, project-based nature of media literacy interventions (which was also linked to funding structures) limited their ability to scale up their work or have a wider impact[10].

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[9] *In the final stage of the project, participants reviewing a draft of this report noted that the idea of a 'sector' had the potential to be quite limiting. If the term designated those organisations who self-identified as delivering media literacy, then it would leave out many different types of organisations for whom media literacy was relevant, who could deliver it, but who would not call themselves part of the sector (e.g., organisations delivering online training for issues related to health, finance, or trying to engage audiences such as job seekers). Coordinating such a porous 'sector', and the need to make media literacy relevant to a wider set of stakeholders so that it could be delivered at scale, were both challenges related to this point.*

[10] *As mentioned in the report's introduction, the government is taking action through its Strategy to address this challenge and the following one, relating to funding.*

> [T]he bit that feels missing is we continue to endlessly fund a series of small projects, but it's like funding lots of pot plants instead of an ecosystem.
>
> *Stakeholder 35*

> [There is] the extent to which the approach [to media literacy] is often very fragmented, very bitty, lots of really excellent initiatives [that are] really, really quite small and local and dependent on the goodwill and the resources of...charities.
>
> *Stakeholder 22*

In the survey, these issues all featured as the most important challenges associated with sector structure, while in the case studies, sector coordination was recognised as an inevitable challenge because of the scale and breadth of media literacy work and the variety of providers in the sector (e.g., in Brazil, Belgium, Netherlands, France). Strong coordinating bodies did mitigate this problem to some extent (e.g., in Finland, Sweden), but some cases also faced problems because of limited infrastructure to support the sector, which could feed into coordination challenges (e.g., in Canada).

Funding structures

Challenges tied to funding structures were significant issues raised by practitioners in the workshop. In particular, short-term, small-scale funding was highlighted as a key problem. It increased the administrative burden of managing and reporting on multiple projects and made strategic investment in skills and knowledge development difficult. Stakeholders also felt it could lead to a loss of skills via staff turnover, because of discontinuity and uncertainty between projects.

Some stakeholders argued that small scale projects fragmented the work done in the sector and made building on project learnings difficult.

> Spending five grand or ten grand or fifty grand – like what's realistically going to be achieved out of whatever [that funds]. It's better pooling all these five grands and ten grands together to think, 'let's look at a city-wide approach or a network approach'.
>
> *Stakeholder 10*

Stakeholders felt they need to tailor projects to funder interests that did not necessarily align with the needs of particular audiences; this also meant that novelty was often prioritised over repeating training that was known to be effective.

> The kind of people who are seeking this funding are finding that they keep on being asked to come up with new, exciting ideas. So, they might have a really good project that's working really well. And their funders will go 'No, but we want something different and innovative'.
>
> *Funder 2*

The time and resources needed for evaluation were not adequately funded, which meant that quality of evaluation was variable, comparability was limited, and lessons from individual projects were not scaled up to the sector level. Funding was also unevenly distributed: smaller, lower profile organisations, which might be well-connected at community level but with less visibility, could lose out to larger organisations.

> If you look at who got the funding, it's kind of [the] bigger organisations. And then that kind of cuts off the…frontline workers. So, there's a bit of kind of bottleneck funding that we have to think about who gets it (funding), and is it spread out evenly, and where is the funding going to?
>
> *Stakeholder 31*

Limited visibility of funding sources meant finding funding required more time and resources, which added to the already considerable requirements of developing a bid and put pressure on smaller organisations in particular.

> Organisations that apply for various funding streams put in a lot of time in building bids for funding. And, you know, [for] an unsuccessful bid, you have to literally [forgo] that investment in time and effort […] It is a component that may very well put a lot of organisations off applying for some of the lower-level bids, given it takes time and effort to put those bids together.
>
> *Stakeholder 26*

In the survey, the small-scale, short-term nature of funding, and the lack of funding allocated to evaluation were ranked as the three most significant challenges in this area. In the international case studies, funding challenges were frequently raised, and were often linked to situations where a long-term strategy for media literacy policy was absent (e.g., in Canada, France), although long-term funding security could still be an issue where a clear policy was in place (e.g., in Belgium, Finland). Limited funding meant that non-profit organisations and government agencies could not rely on long-term support and were dependent on multiple and fragmented sources to carry out their work (e.g., in Canada).

Delivery challenges

Delivery challenges related to two main areas of the day-to-day operation of media literacy interventions: quality and delivering to hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences.

Quality

Quality-related challenges included a lack of research into 'what works' in media literacy, and the absence of a benchmark or framework that could be used to design and evaluate interventions and provide a basis for quality assurance.

> What does good look like? Where is that measure? You can see…that everyone's got their own kind of benchmark. Right? We're ticking that box. But actually, again, that's inconsistent.
>
> *Stakeholder 8*

These issues led to uncertainty about the quality of interventions, exacerbated by a reluctance to recognise poor quality delivery and an inability to share best practice or lessons learned, because of the lack of coordination across the sector.

> There's no QA [quality assurance] really around what's happening. […] some people are doing great work, and others have great intentions. But maybe the work isn't just as good as it could be. And maybe they're actually fuelling misinformation with the best of intentions. So there's no oversight, maybe as to what should be delivered or how or what, what the content should be or what the learning outcomes should be.
>
> *Stakeholder 10*

The survey results reinforced the importance of inconsistent evaluation and uneven quality across the sector as challenges. In the international case studies, variable standards of delivery were noted as a challenge in education settings, and across regions in larger countries (e.g., in Canada, Sweden, France, Brazil). It was also linked to the challenges associated with evaluation (see below), which arose in part because of the lack of evidence about the kinds of outcomes media literacy programmes should be targeting.

Delivering for hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences[11]

Challenges associated with delivering to hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences persist. The workshop participants observed that these groups did not have a particular interest in media literacy and had other more pressing priorities to deal with, as Williams et al. (2016) also indicate. Their complex lives made reaching them difficult, which meant collaboration with other organisations already working with them was necessary, but it was not always easy. From a resource perspective, financial and educational challenges could limit their access to data services, as well as the skills to use those services and other online media.

> The fundamental challenge of how do I engage someone [for whom] media literacy is [at] the bottom of their priority list is by far the most challenging thing. And how [do] you get sustained engagement? How do you meet them where they are?
>
> *Stakeholder 13*

Investment in libraries and other community infrastructures to reach these audiences characterised successful aspects of some international cases (e.g., in Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa), but the difficulty of reaching adult populations not in formal education was echoed across all cases as a pervasive challenge.

Evaluation challenges

Challenges related to evaluation were grouped around the specialist skills and knowledge base required to effectively evaluate media literacy interventions, as well as the related lack of resources experienced by many practitioners.

Evaluation skills and knowledge (outputs vs outcomes)

Participants observed that the sector as a whole lacked skills and knowledge about evaluation practice, as one participant summarised.

> If you think about it from a service delivery organisation [perspective] and actually think about their evaluation skills. So, are people within that organisation competent of making a theory of change? Are they aware of the difference between outputs and outcomes? You can only evaluate something if you know what it is you are seeking to do…and I think there is a real lack of knowledge within organisations.
>
> *Stakeholder 21*

This low level of evaluation skills, alongside the complexity of media literacy effects, gave rise to a number of issues. It meant there was no structured approach or benchmark in place for evaluation, and correspondingly, evaluation was variable, often subjective, and done using qualitative techniques that could not be generalised.[12]

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[11] *As mentioned in the report's introduction, the government is taking action through its Strategy to address this challenge and the following one, relating to evaluation.*

[12] *The Ofcom Evaluation Toolkit was published just after the workshops took place. The toolkit offers valuable guidance on the evaluation process, but does not provide benchmarks for outcomes.*

> It would be so much nicer if we knew that we were measuring things in the same way as other people were measuring them, so that we could all be moving towards a shared set of conclusions…a shared set of questions to arrive at a shared set of answers.
>
> *Stakeholder 20*

> How do you evaluate things like critical thinking? We all agree it's such an important skill to cultivate, but there's not a KPI that you can say, 'Oh, our kids are better off because they've had this media studies education, or they are able to think critically'…. It's really difficult.
>
> *Stakeholder 4*

Stakeholders noted that it was difficult to access participants for evaluation because of the extra time required, and that when it was carried out, there was the risk of bias being introduced (e.g., social desirability bias, because the person who delivered the training also asks participants to evaluate it).

Moreover, longitudinal evaluation of individual impact was very difficult because it was challenging to track participants over time; proprietary platform-based data that could support evaluation was not easily accessible for evaluation. Beyond individual effects, stakeholders argued that evaluating societal impact was extremely difficult, because of the challenge of isolating the effects of media literacy at a collective level.

Practitioners and academics felt that evaluation needed more funding, to research new techniques and support skills development across the sector.

> In an ideal world, when we're doing these initiatives, we will create measures if we need to, we will test them, we will validate them before using them. But oftentimes, there is no funding. The budget you have to do that kind of work is so limited that, of course, at the end of the day, you got to be pragmatic, and you just have to do whatever you can. So, there's always a trade-off. And does this affect the quality of evaluation? Yes, absolutely.
>
> *Academic 3*

The result of these challenges was that evaluations could have limited validity, and comparability across projects was almost impossible because evaluations were so variable. This links to the lack of sector coordination, which makes learning from evaluation difficult to share, or scale up across the sector. In all the case studies, including countries where resilience to misinformation is rated highly, evaluation was also extremely challenging and a direct link between such resilience and media literacy had not been identified or tracked over time. The challenges with evaluation were linked to funding because better evaluation was dependent on funding.

Survey results

Challenges

The challenges discussed in the workshops were consolidated in the survey, which was distributed to stakeholders across the sector in March 2023 (see Appendix 1: Technical Annex). Survey participants were asked to rate the challenges on a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important). The responses showed some clear priorities ranked at the very high end of the scale in each area, as indicated by the high mean values (Table 2). That said, none of the challenges had a mean lower than 3, the mid-point of the importance scale, and very few of the means were below 3.5, suggesting that participants felt there was much to be done to improve the sector.

Table 2: Survey results: Most important challenges[13]

Item	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
The short-term duration of funding	4.49	0.55	39
The small-scale nature of many funded projects	4.24	0.78	38
The difficulty of conducting longitudinal evaluation (e.g., measuring impact on behaviour over time)	4.36	0.65	42
The difficulty of evaluating the societal impact of media literacy programmes	4.21	0.74	42
The need for a long-term, strategic approach to guide the sector's development	4.46	0.71	39
Challenges of scaling up media literacy programmes	4.30	0.73	37
Fragmented delivery of media literacy by a wide variety of organisations	4.10	1.01	39
Visibility and sharing of best practices and resources across the sector	4.05	0.93	39
Maintaining skills across the sector	4.03	0.90	38
Investment in community infrastructures that could support media literacy (e.g., libraries, community centres)	4.40	0.73	40
Low levels of media literacy in general	4.29	0.76	38
Low levels of public trust in the media and other institutions	4.10	0.77	40
Audiences have other more pressing priorities than media literacy training	4.24	0.76	25
The need for access to basic levels of data and broadband services among these audiences	4.08	0.86	24
Limited skills to access and use digital services among these audiences	4.08	0.74	25

The connections between the prioritised items in each section echo the detail of the qualitative findings.

- In funding, the two priorities pose barriers to realising the sector's potential for expansion and scalability.
- In evaluation, the scientific and practical challenges of evaluating two of the most important claims of media literacy's benefits (long-term, societal improvement) are highlighted.
- In sector coordination, the challenges reflect the need to provide more direction for the sector, and more connection between its actors, if its potential is to be realised.
- For hard-to-reach / vulnerable audiences, the challenges reflect aspects of their complex lives that need to be addressed if media literacy is to be delivered.

The results reinforce the fact that some of the challenges affecting delivery of media literacy might be resolved through focused efforts to develop coordination and capacity to scale through various mechanisms. However, they also highlight the fact that many challenges are issues the sector cannot address in isolation, but will likely require coordination and engagement between the sector and the institutions and infrastructures with which it is involved (e.g., government departments, education systems and structures, funders, and social infrastructures).

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[13] *Threshold inclusion as 'most important' was reaching a minimum mean score of 4/5*

Opportunities to improve the UK media literacy landscape

In response to the challenges, and as part of the survey, stakeholders were asked to rank a series of opportunities that had been identified in the qualitative workshops and interviews[14][15]. These were categorised into the areas of funding, evaluation, sector coordination, governance, delivery, and platforms.

Choices about what measures to implement as the Online Media Literacy Strategy evolves are necessarily dependent on a wide range of factors, and this ranking was conducted as an indicative exercise only, to identify which opportunities stakeholders commonly recognised as potentially most useful. They should not be read as a definitive agenda for the government, given that the research did not consider perspectives outside of sector stakeholders, as noted at the beginning of the report.

The following opportunities attracted the most agreement:

- Funding: Create a fund for media literacy via industry sources.
- Evaluation: Define standards / benchmarks for programmes and outcomes.
- Sector coordination: Create a convening space for the sector to come together.
- Governance: Treat media literacy as a basic mandated skill like reading and writing.
- Delivery: Invest in training and supporting teachers; outside the school environment, embed media literacy in services people already use.

The ranking of these opportunities reflects many of the most critical challenges identified by the survey participants.

- Funding opportunities focus on ensuring funding is reliable and visible to sector actors.
- In evaluation, a better basis for evaluation, and more research, are prioritised.
- Coordination opportunities prioritise ways to improve connections within the sector.
- In governance, priorities focus on the ways in which media literacy could be formally recognised as a skillset with broad relevance.
- For delivery, the focus is on both using and improving the infrastructures on which delivery depends.
- For platforms, the need to enforce responsibility and openness is highlighted.

Conclusion

The challenges shared by participants were multiple, and despite the range of organisations participating, there was general agreement about these areas of concern. Many of them overlap – for example, funding structures limit the scalability of initiatives; a lack of clear benchmarks or specified outcomes affects scalability, evaluation quality and sharing best practice. These overlaps suggest that if opportunities for change are chosen carefully, they may be able to address more than one challenge at a time.

As noted above, the findings from this project echo many of the findings in existing academic research. For example, they confirm the broad scope of media literacy and the wide range of actors involved in its delivery, (e.g., Palsa and Salomaa, 2020; McDougall, 2019a), but also reinforce the challenges this presents in terms of the ability to coordinate and monitor practices, ensure consistent quality and share insights between practitioners. Participants discussed the need to keep up with the complex digital environment to address the risks and opportunities that come from media engagement (e.g., Edwards, et al., 2021), but also pushed back

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[14] *The opportunity categories do not directly correspond to the categories in the challenges, because the stakeholder discussions evolved to be more detailed and specific about the opportunities for change.*

[15] *The list of opportunities was not informed by the case study findings, but the results complement the elements identified as characteristic of good practice in the cases, and should be read in conjunction with those findings.*

against too strong an emphasis on online harm, suggesting that this needed to be balanced with a more positive framing of media use.

The complex challenge presented by evaluation was discussed; however, while academic research has focused on the difficulty of establishing appropriate measures for media literacy outcomes (e.g., Jones-Jang et al., 2021; Encheva et al., 2020; Bulger and Davison, 2018; Schilder et al., 2016), our participants extended these insights by outlining the practical challenges that evaluation presents, including the difficulties securing participants, accessing proprietary data, and the impact of limited skill levels and knowledge of evaluation across the sector, as well as limited time and funding.

Discussions of funding confirmed the importance of long-term investment in media literacy (Kanižaj, 2017), but also highlighted other issues, including the way funding was distributed across the sector, the tensions created by different priorities, and the administrative burden of managing multiple small grants instead of fewer, larger ones. Finally, the difficulties of reaching some audiences and the importance of wider inequalities in determining access to media more generally as well as media literacy, identified in previous academic research (Mihailidis et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2016), were also confirmed.

Academic discussion

We held an online discussion in January 2023 with eight UK-based academics experts on media literacy, to hear their thoughts and insights on the workshop findings. Overall, they affirmed the findings of the workshop, indicating that the challenges in the sector are consistent across the board and reflect issues they had found in their individual research activities. Some of them expressed frustration that these challenges had not been resolved despite the evidence base that the academic community has gathered over the years.

The academics' perspectives were inflected towards the impact of the challenges identified on research capacity and capability. They emphasised the role of research in supporting media literacy delivery, but recognised that academic research was not easily accessible, and was often behind a paywall. They felt there should be other ways of making research available to practitioners.

> I know this is super simple. But might it be useful to say actually, 'Here are the top ten readings on data literacy or this media literacy project on the elderly or media literacy [and] disability?' I actually realised we talk glibly about evidence with access to expensive libraries, but out there, people actually have no access.
>
> *Academic 7*

Academics also connected funding and research, pointing out that research funding is also difficult to find for longitudinal research, and for mapping the sector. Gaps remain, as a result, in the understanding of longer-term changes that are required in the sector. Some suggested consolidated funding, where funds are collectively applied for to support collaborative long-term research.

The remaining challenges that the academics highlighted reflected the workshop discussions. For instance, academics mentioned challenges around context and delivery, including the complexity of the environment, the mixed interests of platforms and other corporate / industry players, and the need for more research into complex digital technology practices and how they work – something that requires not just digital proficiency skills, but also critical thinking capabilities.

> For me, one of the big problems is that a lot of the approaches focus on the doing, on the acts of just getting people out there in terms of digital engagement, and [don't] focus really on the critical aspects which we see as crucial […] So unless we have a framework [that] is comprehensive for all types of populations, but includes the critical [thinking] aspects – […] unless we have this critical angle to it, we're not going to do the job [of delivering critical media literacy] and we have to do it comprehensively.
>
> *Academic 6*

Evaluation and its links to research and funding was also recognised as a crucial problem, particularly the limited links between practitioners and academic researchers focused on evaluation, as well as the lack of funding for evaluation studies.

The academics also highlighted challenges of reaching adult, hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences, because of the emphasis on children and young people in many initiatives.

> I do wonder if […] the type of projects that get advertised and then funded is perhaps a little bit too focused on the children and the vulnerable groups. And it's true that they do need to focus [on these groups], but not to the exclusion of wider society. And I sort of think we do need more media literacy initiatives [that] are actually just a bit more general.
>
> *Academic 8*

> We actually also found out that while there is a lot of emphasis on young people, there's actually no kind of reference to old people who don't have these kinds of institutions like schools or universities where they can actually learn these kinds of things.
>
> *Academic 1*

Finally, evaluation challenges connected back to issues of quality and certification – relating to whether people attending a particular workshop can be certified media literate, and the lack of a basis to determine who is media literate and who is not.

International case studies

The case studies demonstrated an array of approaches and attitudes to media literacy in different environments. Often, the approach was shaped by the wider country context: South Africa, for example, emphasised skills that would help economic development; Brazil combined media literacy with other forms of basic literacy including reading and writing; Estonia (following a Russian cyberattack) emphasised the importance of resilience against mis- and disinformation; Canada incorporated considerations of indigenous cultures and historical injustices into media literacy resources. This reflected the reality that media literacy is a 'broad church' of contextualised practice relevant to a wide range of social issues and challenges.

It was evident from the cases that there is no single model for effectively increasing media literacy levels. More coordinated approaches appeared to be easier in smaller, more homogeneous nations such as Finland, Ireland or Estonia, whereas a larger country such as France or Brazil hosted a more disparate and fragmented sector. In addition, where countries had a longer history of attention to media skills and education, they tended to engage in a more comprehensive range of activities.

The analysis revealed the following patterns across cases:

- **A diverse range of definitions:** In some countries, media literacy is seen as digital empowerment; in others, there is more of a focus on resilience against online harms; some countries focus on digital proficiency; others on critical skills.
- **A diverse range of players:** Different stakeholders play key roles depending on the country; stakeholders include government departments (e.g., Ministry of Education or Culture), media regulators, public service media, libraries, NGOs and civil society groups, and tech platforms.
- **A strong focus on media literacy education:** All the countries we studied have adopted an education-based approach to media literacy with a focus on delivery through schools, although to varying extents. Within the curriculum, media literacy tends to be viewed as a cross-curricular (or transversal) subject.
- **National media literacy strategy:** Most countries still do not have a national strategy on media literacy, despite many stakeholders supporting one. Where these do exist (e.g., Finland, Belgium (Flanders), Ireland), they provide valuable direction and legitimacy for media literacy work.
- **Valuable programmes and events:** Several countries organise dedicated Media Literacy Weeks (e.g., Canada, Finland, France, New Zealand) and 'media coach' or 'ambassador' initiatives (e.g., South Africa). These provide a focus for awareness and training.
- **Networks:** Some countries (e.g., Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), France, Sweden) have established media literacy networks to better coordinate the sector. Such networks are usually established as government initiatives but are run on a day-to-day basis by stakeholders in the sector. Volunteer support is key but must be backed up with funding and resources.

Challenges

Challenges across the cases were very similar to those identified in the UK, despite differences based on the country context (e.g., history of media education and literacy, centralisation vs decentralisation of the sector, mandated or optional in education). The most significant challenges highlighted in our research are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Most significant international case study challenges identified (listed in no particular order).

Media literacy in schools
There are regional and demographic disparities in standards of delivery, particularly in larger countries
There is often insufficient and inconsistent teacher training on media literacy[16]
Teachers lack the time to integrate media literacy into lessons effectively when it is approached as a cross-curricular subject, because it has to be fitted into an already crowded curriculum
It is harder to evaluate the success of media literacy teaching when it is not treated as a stand-alone subject
Updating curricula to reflect the evolving digital environment requires significant resources
Lack of coordination
Coordination was a universal challenge, because media literacy is such a large area of work with many different actors
Coordination is more difficult when there is no national policy / strategy that creates a focus for the sector
Vulnerable and hard to reach groups
Reaching adults outside formal education, and vulnerable groups in particular, is a pervasive challenge across all cases
Funding and Infrastructure
Long-term funding is usually a struggle, especially for non-profits and government agencies
There is a lack of infrastructure (e.g., technology, expertise, data services) to deliver media literacy both within and outside schools
Evaluation
Evaluation is rarely carried out effectively, and there is a lack of evidence-based practice in all cases, even the most developed sectors (e.g., Canada, France, Finland, Ireland)
Framing
There are tensions between balancing digital proficiency with critical thinking and resilience against misinformation
The societal benefits of media literacy can be neglected if the focus is on digital skills or online harm
Teaching a 'holistic' version of media literacy requires extensive resources and skillsets that are not always available
Platforms and the evolving technology landscape
It is difficult for practitioners to keep on top of developments like generative AI
Practitioners are often unsure about how to work with platform companies, given that they are also closely associated with the problems that media literacy is trying to solve

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[16] *This is not to say there is no training: in some countries media literacy training is part of core teacher training requirements, in others there is optional training available throughout teachers' careers. However, the issues of insufficiency and inconsistency were raised across both scenarios: most respondents reported that the best approach would be to have both a core element of training and ongoing supplementary training to keep up with changes in the media and digital environment.*

Positive practices

Alongside the challenges, the case analyses revealed clusters of good practice that consistently support effective media literacy delivery. We found that very little, if any, consistent analyses of impact were made in the different countries, and it was not possible to conduct an assessment as part of the research because of the lack of access to appropriate data. Therefore, the assessment of the value of the practices listed below is based on the explanations of case study interviewees, who explained how each practice connected to and facilitated media literacy delivery. As such, they are useful considerations as the Online Media Literacy Strategy evolves.

- **Government recognition of the societal value of media literacy** is important, because it provides public legitimacy and a longer-term focus for the sector (e.g., Estonia's Ministry of Education leadership, and the parallel communications activity of its Government Office; the Swedish Media Council's mandate for improving national levels of media literacy).
- Interviewees perceived **effective government support** (e.g., in Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands) to be based on:
  - '**Leadership without ownership'**, where national strategies/policies provided direction and a framework for the sector without over-determining delivery, and incorporating flexibility for regional differentiation.
  - **National policies that were created collaboratively and made public**, increasing buy-in among stakeholders and a high level of commitment to policy aims and objectives (e.g., in Ireland, Finland).
  - **Provision of essential funding and resources** to support strategies, which helped to provide certainty and continuity.
  - A focus for **ownership of media literacy within government**, which supported a coordinated and consistent approach to the sector's development.
- **Benchmarks, standards, competencies and other specified outcomes** helped to focus media literacy efforts. When phrased in open terms and/or focused on broad outcomes, they helped to futureproof media literacy work in a fast-changing environment (e.g., in Ireland, Flanders in Belgium).
- The most comprehensive approaches have **a 'layered' infrastructure** (multiple actors delivering to multiple audiences through multiple channels), which creates complexity and coordination challenges, but delivers more inclusive coverage and engages a wider range of stakeholders (e.g., libraries, health and youth sectors, philanthropists, charities, private sector organisations).[17]
- **Accessible and well-curated resources** are particularly important, especially when the sector is large and diverse, because they facilitate sharing of resources and practices. They are often produced and distributed by public service media organisations.
- A **coordinating body or network** can play a significant role, and most cases have more than one. They provide a hub for expertise and resources and act as a convening space for practitioners, virtually or in person. Different bodies engage with different areas of media literacy (e.g., formal education / adult outreach / film and audio-visual literacy). They often act at arms' length from government, which maintains independence from political interests, preserves their agility, allows them to access funding from other sources, and allows them to lobby government when necessary. Examples of this approach include the Netherlands, Ireland, and Sweden.

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[17] *Only one country, Finland, had done a comprehensive sector mapping exercise, but found that it helped with efforts to coordinate media literacy work more widely.*

> The network approach has been really successful and has proven to be successful because it connects so many partners and they can help each other as well.
>
> *Maarten Gloria, Media and Creative Industries Directorate*
> *Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Netherlands*

■ Vibrant media literacy sectors had **a high level of stakeholder engagement and volunteer contribution**, which seemed to increase the energy behind media literacy efforts.

> It's based so much on individuals who are enthusiastic about this, and they learn about these ideas and then try them out, they see that 'okay, this works for me and I think it is a good idea' – and because they don't have to do it, they probably do much more.
>
> *Leo Pekkala, Deputy Director and Head of Media Education and Audiovisual Department*
> *Finnish National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI)*

■ Creating a concentrated focus on media literacy to improve public awareness and buy-in was done in multiple ways, but most commonly through **'festivals' of media literacy** (e.g., a Media Literacy Week), with engaging activities rolled out across the whole population. These were described as a way of bringing the sector together and as having potential for significant impact beyond the festival itself (e.g., by raising the profile of media literacy in the longer term among a wide range of organisations and audiences).

■ When media literacy was **incorporated into the educational curriculum** (whether transversal or stand-alone), it receives more attention and more investment from schools and the government. For example, both Finland, where media literacy is a transversal subject throughout formal education, and France, where media literacy has long played a role in the curriculum, have public bodies dedicated to media education (KAVI in Finland and CLEMI in France). In Canada, Ontario plays a leading role in media education partly because media literacy has been included in the Ontario curriculum.

■ In four countries (Sweden, Finland, Estonia, South Africa), **universities played an important role** as hubs for teacher training, research and practice development for the sector, running degrees in media literacy, and providing a home for media literacy research. They contributed to the overall skill level in the sector, to the awareness and legitimacy of media literacy, and were regular collaborators.

Although it is clear that each country's specific context and landscape is different and what works well in one country will not necessarily work well in another, these examples provide a way of understanding what current good practices are, and where potential high-value changes could be made.

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Appendix 1: Technical annex

This research was commissioned by the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT - formerly DCMS) in October 2022, as part of its efforts to address challenges, barriers and inefficiencies in the media literacy sector, and build capabilities in organisations to meet the ambition of the Online Media Literacy Strategy without over-reliance on government intervention. The research objectives were:

1) To develop an accurate picture of the challenges the media literacy sector faces in relation to coordination, funding, evaluation and any other key challenges that emerge through the research.
2) To gain insights from a rigorous comparison of other international contexts and identify the lessons that the government can learn from their approaches to media literacy.
3) To identify policy opportunities for intervention from government and other actors to improve the UK media literacy landscape. In particular, DSIT are seeking opportunities that are tangible, and feasible to implement over the next 1-5 years.

The research was designed as a stakeholder-centric, in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by the UK media literacy sector, using the challenges set out in the Online Media Literacy Strategy as a starting point (evaluation, funding, reaching vulnerable and hard-to-reach[18] audiences, resilience to mis/disinformation, coordination across the sector). The methodology was designed in line with the principles of good consultation, and aimed to be:

- Inclusive – ensuring all those who have a stake in the delivery of media literacy and interests in its benefits are consulted, within the parameters of the brief.
- Well-informed – ensuring robust, wide-ranging and rigorous evidence is gathered, and that the stakeholders involved are able to reflect on views different from their own, in order to develop thoughtful contributions and mutual understanding.
- Balanced – ensuring that the recommendations are a reflection of the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders involved, and that an adequate compromise is reached between those interests and perspectives, where necessary.
- Accountable – ensuring that stakeholders are fully informed about the consultation process, the ways in which their information will be used, and have the opportunity to ask questions about the process and outcomes of the consultation, should they wish to.

Methods used

A total of five different methods were used: stakeholder workshops, individual interviews with 6 funders; an academic roundtable; 11 comparative case analyses; and a quantitative survey. The methods were chosen to complement one another, given that they account for the views of the various actors who operate in and around media literacy. The stakeholder workshops and survey gave us insight into the perspective of practitioners, the funder interviews captured funding decisions and processes, the academic roundtable addressed the views of media literacy researchers, and the case analyses allowed for comparisons across UK and international contexts.

The qualitative methods allowed us to add rich insights to the challenges already identified in the Online Media Literacy Strategy, as well as extend those insights into new areas, based on the lived experiences of stakeholders. The discussions with stakeholders revealed the complexity of the media literacy landscape, and the interconnectedness of the challenges identified. The survey was conducted as part of the research and provided confirmation of the qualitative data among a wider group of stakeholders. However, the lack of a

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[18] *The participants in the study felt that a more accurate term to describe these audiences was 'neglected'. They also argued that media literacy is 'hard-to-reach' for audiences, and not the other way round. For the purposes of consistency with the Online Media Literacy Strategy, we use the term hard-to-reach in this report.*

definitive mapping of the sector, and the randomised survey design, meant that the representativity of different parts of the sector among the survey respondents could not be confirmed. Nonetheless, both the qualitative and quantitative results are valuable as a robust representation of the views of a significant group of practitioners, funders and academics in the UK's media literacy landscape, involved in a majority of current interventions.

Because the discussions were stakeholder-driven, and based on their experiences, they also included comments about the intersection of education and media literacy, as well as the overall approach of government to media literacy. However, these comments are out of scope for this research, and were not published in the final report.

The research brief did not include consultation with government policymakers or officials working on media literacy, or with the beneficiaries of media literacy interventions. Further research would be needed to incorporate insights from these two groups.

This annex provides the full detail for each method.

Stakeholder workshops

Two stakeholder workshops (one in-person for a full day; one online, 2 hours long) were held in November and December 2022 with a total of 34 stakeholders from a range of organisations active in the UK media literacy landscape. The organisations included NGOs, industry associations (e.g., the Media and Information Literacy Alliance), charities, news media, and technology companies.

Invitations to participate were sent to a list of named individuals from 67 organisations, identified from desk research, the list of 170 media literacy actors identified in the DCMS mapping exercise. The list included a range of different types of organisations, to ensure that the workshop participants represented a variety of different types of organisations. The final confirmed participant list comprised 21 participants. 13 participants who were unable to attend but still wished to contribute to the research attended an online workshop, and individual interviews were conducted with three stakeholders, who could not attend either workshop. One stakeholder responded to the questions by email. The final list of participant organisations across both workshops and the interviews is in the table below.

Table 2: Participant organisations and stakeholder workshops

Organization	Event
Association for Citizenship Teaching	Online workshop
Our Version Media	Online workshop
Lancashire Libraries	Online workshop
LSE (VF)	Online workshop
Media Education Association	Online workshop
National Literacy Trust	Online workshop
Shout Out UK	Online workshop
South West Grid for Learning	Online workshop
The Economist Educational Foundation	Online workshop
The Student View	Online workshop
UNESCO	Online workshop
The Times and Sunday Times (News UK)	Online workshop
NewsGuard	Online workshop

Organization	Event
Good Things Foundation	In-person workshop
Leeds Older People's Forum	In-person workshop
English and Media Association	In-person workshop
ATU, Ireland	In-person workshop
AgeUK	In-person workshop
Association for Citizenship Teaching	In-person workshop
Informall	In-person workshop
Parent Zone	In-person workshop
100% Digital Leeds	In-person workshop
Internet Matters	In-person workshop
University of Liverpool	In-person workshop
Young Citizens	In-person workshop
BBC	In-person workshop
Twitter	In-person workshop
Cwmpas/Digital Communities Wales	In-person workshop
The Guardian Foundation	In-person workshop
First News Education	In-person workshop
UNESCO	In-person workshop
Lie Detectors	In-person workshop
FullFact	In-person workshop
Ofcom	In-person workshop
PSHE Association	Interview
News Literacy Network	Interview
Google	Interview
LEGO	Responses by email

To ensure participants had a common level of information and understanding about media literacy, and about the challenges the sector currently faced, participants were sent a briefing pack before the workshops and interview. The pack contained the briefing and consent form for the research, specifying anonymity, confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time; several summaries of recent relevant Ofcom and DCMS research; the executive summary of the Online Media Literacy Strategy; and a briefing document for the event, giving them an overview of definitions of media literacy and a summary of the challenges / opportunities for change already identified in research and set out in the Online Media Literacy Strategy. The documents were:

- Participant Briefing Document
- Workshop Consent Form
- Workshop Structure (Agenda)
- Online Media Literacy - Executive Summary
- Adults Media Use and Attitudes Report - Overview
- DCMS Mapping Exercise - Phase 2 - Overview
- Ofcom approach-to-online-media-literacy - Executive Summary
- Ofcom childrens-media-use-and-attitudes-report - Overview

- [Ofcom msom-evaluate - Overview](#)
- [Ofcom online-nation-2022-report - Overview](#)
- [Rea-online-misinformation - Executive Summary](#)

Copies of the briefing pack were made available during the workshop for easy reference. Consent forms were collected via email or at the in-person event.

The in-person workshop was a full-day event, divided into four sessions: three addressed societal, structural and practice-based challenges, respectively, and a fourth addressed opportunities for the sector going forward. Stakeholders were broken up into five small groups for each of the sessions. A moderator guided their progress using a pre-defined set of questions (Box A1), and took notes. The online workshop was a more condensed discussion, divided into two sections, 'challenges' and 'opportunities'. Two moderated breakout rooms were created for each session. In both workshops, plenary discussions were held at the end of each small-group discussion, where the groups shared their insights with all other participants. Interviews followed the same structure as the workshop discussions.

All sessions were recorded and transcribed, and a qualitative thematic analysis of the data was conducted using NVIVO software. The analysis used the discussion categories to identify an initial set of broad themes from the data (societal, structural and practice-based challenges, and opportunities). These themes were then broken down into more specific topics as the detail of the discussion was revealed through the data. 102 analytical categories were identified, across the following themes.

- Definitions of media literacy
- Technological and digital environment
- Sector coordination and structure
- Funding (structures, types)
- Funder decision-making
- Funder processes
- Delivery of media literacy (including in schools)
- Neglected and vulnerable audiences
- Online Harms focus
- Role of government
- Role of platforms
- Evaluation
- Policy opportunities

Data in each category was analysed in detail in order to understand exactly what the specific challenge was that stakeholders were identifying, as well elicit the connections between categories that would deliver a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of current sector. The analysis was written up in an interim report and delivered to DSIT in January 2023. The box below shows the guidelines used by the moderators in each table.

Box 1: Moderator briefing document

Moderator prompts: Opening session
As the discussion progresses, make sure:
a) Everyone has a chance to speak and make a contribution – invite people by name to participate.
b) Prompt people to reflect on each other's contributions, try to avoid them speaking only to you or answering your question – you want to achieve a dialogue around the table, not just a Q & A.
c) Avoid single topics dominating the discussion in each session (e.g., funding and evaluation may prompt a lot of discussion, so try to make sure that people have had a chance to say their piece, but more to a different topic earlier rather than later – you can always return to them if you have time at the end).
Questions: Societal/Structural/Practice-Based Sessions

1) How do the points highlighted in the briefing for this session resonate with your experience?
Prompt: tell us a bit more about how your experience of [xx] unfolds in practice.
Ask group members for their reflections on the different points – do they experience these problems in the same way, or in different ways?

2) Are there any other societal / structural / practice-based challenges that you regularly grapple with when you are delivering media literacy interventions?
Prompt: Ask other groups members for their reflections on new topics – do they experience these problems in the same way, or in different ways?

3) In what ways are these issues linked to each other?
Note: as the sessions progress, also ask participants how the issues in the current section relate to the previous one.

4) If you had to choose, which of these challenges are the most significant barriers to delivering media literacy in better ways across the sector?
Prompt: Why are these the most significant ones? If they were addressed, what would it change?

Policy Opportunities Session

Before you start:

a) Remind participants that this is a very open discussion, so they should propose any ideas, no matter how radical they seem.

b) Remind participants that the idea of the discussion is to provide opportunities for policymakers to consider as they progress the Online Media Literacy Strategy, but we can't guarantee that the opportunities will translate into policy because that depends on so many other factors.

Introduction: The focus is on identifying policy opportunities for addressing the challenges we've discussed. As you can see from the briefing note, a few initiatives have been put in place already.

1) What other measures do you think would be useful, that policymakers could consider?
Prompt: which challenges would these address? How might they be implemented in practice?

2) How might you link different measures together to strengthen them in practice?

3) Of the measures you've considered, which do you think are most important?
Prompt: Why are they the most important ones?

4) Can you rank the top ten options we've discussed?
Note – if less than ten, just rank the ones they have discussed.

Academic discussion

We held a one-hour online 'roundtable' discussion with eight UK-based academic experts, in January 2023. The discussion gathered participants' reflections on the findings from the workshops and asked them for any additional insights, based on their research and expertise. The discussion ensured that existing media literacy expertise in the academic community was incorporated into the research. Participants were provided in advance with the briefing document for the research, a consent form confirming anonymity and confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time, and a summary of the workshop findings.

The session was structured very openly, since the objective was to gather their expert insights on the findings so far from the study, rather than to gather their understandings of challenges and opportunities. Participants were simply asked to reflect on the findings and draw on their own research and knowledge as they shared their insights. The session was recorded and transcribed, then analysed manually to identify key themes in the

discussion. Their reflections on the stakeholder discussions, and on how these linked to the research environment for media literacy, were incorporated into the overall analysis.

Funder interviews

Six individual interviews were held with funders in January 2023. Representatives from 15 funding organisations were invited to participate, selected based on desk research carried out by the team, information from the stakeholder workshop discussions, and our own knowledge of the sector. The interviews were 30-60 minutes long and focused on funders' perspectives of the funding landscape for media literacy in the UK, the models they applied for their funding practice, and any innovations or changes that they felt could improve funding practices (Box A2). The interviews were focused primarily on funding, but the participants offered many other insights about the sector based on their knowledge. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed in NVIVO in conjunction with the stakeholder workshop data, using the same coding framework.

Box 2: Funder interview schedule

Introduction: The funding landscape

    a) Why do you fund media literacy interventions?
    b) How would you describe the media literacy funding landscape?
         Probe: differences between corporate, philanthropy and government funding approaches, competition across funders and types of funders
    c) What funding models are used currently to support media literacy interventions?
         Probe: which do you think are most effective?

Participants' funding practices

    a) What processes do you follow when allocating funding?
         Probe: application processes, internal approvals, internal budget complexities
    b) What are your priorities when considering whether or not to offer funding?
         Probe: why are these your priorities?
    c) Are there things you would like to prioritise but don't or can't? Why?
         Probe: organisational priorities, social outcomes, evaluation, impact

Innovation

    a) What advantages and what limitations do you see in funding as it is currently offered?
         Probe: financial cycles, competition between funders or providers, restrictive or prescriptive agendas, power dynamics across funders or funding sectors
    b) What kinds of changes in structures or processes across the funding and media literacy sectors, could make media literacy funding more long-term and consistent?
         Probe: structuring funding pots centrally or regionally, balance across funding providers/sources, cooperation between funders
    c) If there were a uniform system of identifying what media literacy is, what needs to be evaluated, and the media literacy priorities/competencies that require funding, would it affect your funding activities? How?
    d) In what ways do you think funders could work together to provide support for the media literacy sector?
         Probe: collaboration opportunities, working within a prescribed framework, government-led priorities, other roles for government to support, getting new funders / new sources of funding on board

Survey

Following the analysis of the findings, a survey was constructed to assess the importance of the most frequently mentioned challenges and opportunities revealed through the workshops and interviews. The

purpose of the survey was to confirm whether the findings from the qualitative discussions were valid across the sector as a whole.

The survey structure followed the categories of challenges and opportunities revealed through the qualitative analysis, and so it diverged somewhat from the original division between societal, structural and practice challenges, and opportunities. The survey was also checked against the findings from the case studies, to confirm that no challenges or opportunities revealed to be critical in other contexts, were neglected.

The survey was divided into 4 sections:

- An introductory statement confirming consent, anonymity, and a question identifying the type of organisation respondents belonged.
- 5 questions containing challenges for context, sector coordination, funding, evaluation, and the role of government.
- 2 questions containing challenges relating to reaching neglected and vulnerable audience, and delivery in schools (these were only answered by participants who worked in these contexts).
- 6 questions containing opportunities relating to funding, evaluation, coordination, governance, delivery, the role of platforms.

Respondents were asked to rate the challenges based on a scale of importance where 1=not important at all, and 5=extremely important, and were asked to rank order the policy opportunities. The questions, and the items within each question were presented in a random order to participants, in order to minimise any bias in responses resulting from the sequencing of the questionnaire.

The survey was piloted with 4 stakeholders who had participated in the workshop, after which it was shortened and the language of some questions was simplified. The final survey was distributed via the Qualtrics platform to 128 organisations, identified through the workshop participants, Ofcom's library of media literacy initiatives, and DSIT contacts. 45 responses were received, a response rate of 35%. Six responses were incomplete and responses per question therefore varied between 39 and 43.[19] The results were analysed in Qualtrics and a descriptive analysis produced as an interim report. 'Don't know' responses were not included in the data analysis.

Case studies

Eleven international case comparisons were conducted from February to April 2023, to identify lessons for the UK based on the approach to media literacy adopted in other countries. Cases were selected for analysis based on one or more of the following factors:

- A strong tradition of media literacy training within or outside formal education (e.g., Canada, Finland, France, Sweden).
- Similarities to the UK context in terms of one or more of the following:
    - Demography (e.g., France),
    - Intellectual framing of media literacy (e.g., Canada, New Zealand),
    - Challenges (e.g., Belgium, Estonia, Ireland),
    - Proximity in terms of geography and governance (Ireland).
- High level of digital skills and digital literacy (e.g., Finland, the Netherlands).
- A global spread beyond Europe (e.g., Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa).

The cases were categorised into three groups:

- **In-depth case studies:** Canada, France, The Netherlands.

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[19] *This was because the random ordering of questions meant that no single question was answered by all 45 participants.*

- **Medium case studies:** Belgium (Flanders), Finland, Ireland.
- **Shorter case studies:** Brazil, Estonia, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden.

For all case studies, we conducted extensive desk research in our review of policies, reports, scholarly publications, periodicals, media coverage and website entries. In addition, each of the medium-length case studies featured an interview with at least one media literacy stakeholder, and each of the in-depth case studies included interviews with at least three media literacy stakeholders. The stakeholders were selected based on their familiarity with the media literacy context in that country and their role in the sector (e.g., as a leader of an important networking body, or major initiative). The interviews lasted 1-2 hours and were focused on obtaining a detailed description of the media literacy sector in that country, how it was structured and managed, and information about specific practices that worked well as well as what was less effective.

Information from the desk research and the interviews was compiled and written up as a full case for each country. Each case included the following sections: Introduction and overview; key organisations and actors in the sector; challenges being faced by the sector; interesting initiatives being conducted in the sector; and a summary of aspects of the case from which the UK could learn. There was some variability in structure because each case had its own characteristics that needed to be addressed in enough depth and detail to construct a coherent analysis.