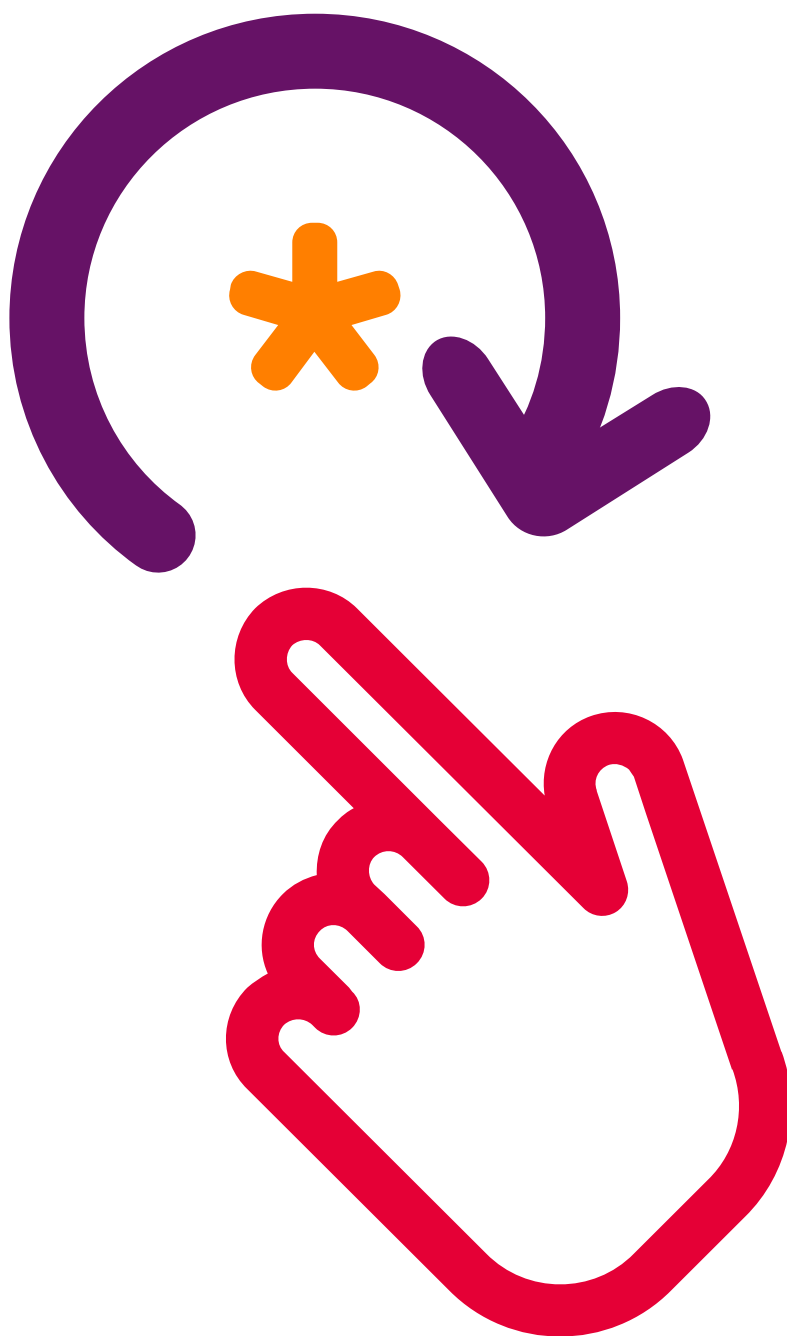


Ofcom Media Literacy Bulletin

Issue 4
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Contents

Welcome to the bulletin

News

- Children making radio
- Westminster Media Forum 'Implementing media literacy: empowerment, participation and responsibility'
- 'Get Safe Online' launched
- A 'media diet' for kids
- Media literacy charter launched
- Home Office issues chatroom and search engine child protection guidelines
- Protecting Children Online: joint EU / Virtual Global Task Force conference
- Adult learning and media literacy: Cardiff conference
- Cyber-safety story telling awards ceremony
- 'Newsday' on Channel 4
- A professional association for media education

In focus

- A year in media literacy by Andrea Millwood Hargrave

Events

- European Safer Internet day 2006
- Every Child Matters: safeguarding children in a digital world
- Silver Surfers' Week 2006

Take part

- About the bulletin
- How to get involved

Welcome to the bulletin

Welcome to the last issue – this year – of Ofcom’s media literacy bulletin.

There has been a great deal of activity over the last few months so we have many items of news to report. Indeed, the whole year has been a busy one with media literacy moving up the agenda of many organisations, so we’ve asked former research director of the BSC and ITC Andrea Millwood-Hargrave to take a look back at the year in Media Literacy to remind us all of developments.

Don’t forget, we will be publishing the most comprehensive audit of media literacy ever undertaken in the UK in January, with follow up reports focusing on particular groups published over the following months.

For more information on the bulletin, including how you can get involved, please see page 11.

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. See you all in 2006.

media.literacy@ofcom.org.uk

News

Children making radio

In September, *Children and radio* (an organisation promoting radio by and for children and young people) published ‘Children making radio’ a report looking at the children’s participation in radio of all kinds, from mainstream broadcast to school and community stations.

The report notes that whilst making radio is now easier than ever before, radio still seems to lag behind visual electronic formats as the medium of choice. None-the-less, around one in ten 11-16 year olds say they have taken part in the making of radio programmes, with entering competitions and contributing to phone discussions being the most popular forms of participation.

The full report is available online at www.childrenandradio.org.uk/. Other radio initiatives involving children and young people include www.radiowaves.co.uk, a network of online radio stations providing schools with their own stations and international broadcast platform.

Westminster Media Forum ‘Implementing media literacy: empowerment, participation and responsibility’

On 27 October the Westminster Media Forum (WMF) held a seminar on media literacy chaired by Danny Alexander MP & Roger Gale MP. The keynote speakers, Robin Blake (Ofcom) and Heather Rabbatts (Head of Education, Channel 4 and Chair of the Media Literacy Task Force) gave an overview of Ofcom’s approach to media literacy and the work of the Task Force respectively. Speakers from the BBC,

Cardiff University and Open Democracy discussed the ways in which developments in communications technology had enabled the 'ordinary citizen' to take a more active role in the production of news.

A more detailed summary of the event can be found on Roger Darlington's website at www.rogerdarlington.co.uk/commswatch/permalink.php?id=2069_0_2_0_C. Roger is Chair of the Internet Watch Foundation and a member of Ofcom's Consumer Panel. The WMF will be publishing a full report, see www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/mediaforum.

Get Safe Online launched

'Get Safe Online' was launched on 27 October. Get Safe Online is a joint initiative between Government departments and industry to better educate the public about online safety issues such as viruses, fraud and child safety (www.getsafeonline.org).

Research published by the campaign suggests a significant gap between public concern about potential online threats and actual behaviour. Nearly one in five people in the UK (17%) said internet crime was of greater concern than physical crimes like car theft and mugging and 87% said they rated securing their computer as one of their top security priorities. However, half of those surveyed went on to say they had little or no knowledge of safe computing practices and only a third of internet users update their anti-virus software at least every three months.

A 'media diet' for kids

October saw the launch, at the House of Commons, of 'The Media Diet for Kids'. The media diet is aimed at helping parents wanting to control - and make the most of - TV and computer games. It proposes a 3 step approach:

- setting limits;
- ensuring quality screen time; and
- identifying appropriate media substitutes for time away from the screen

Parents are provided with tools such as a media diary and games portfolio to help manage their kids' consumption of media and improve their 'media health'. Further details are available at www.mediadietforkids.com

Media literacy charter launched

The Media Literacy Task Force, chaired by Heather Rabbatts (Head of Education at Channel 4), has drawn up a Charter for Media Literacy.

The main purpose of the Charter is to raise the profile of media literacy as a significant portfolio of skills, knowledge and understanding needed by every citizen in the 21st century. The Task Force hopes that it will help to establish the value of media literacy and encourage both public and private investment in its development.

The Task Force includes representatives of the BBC, the British Film Institute, Channel Four, Skillset and the UK Film Council with Ofcom sitting as an observer.

On 10 November 2005, James Purnell MP (the Minister for Cultural Industries and Tourism) received a briefing from Task Force members to formally launch the Charter.

We'll have more news on the Charter in the next issue, in the meantime see www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/filmindustry/mlitcharter/ for further information.

Home Office issues chatroom and search engine child protection guidelines

On 15 November the Home Office issued new guidance, developed with the help of internet service providers, children's charities and others, to help create a safer online environment for children when they use moderated chat services or search engines. The guidance says that providers should:

- offer users a way of reporting material that is illegal or potentially harmful to children;
- offer content filtering on search engines;
- manually review and approve websites included in search services aimed at children;
- consider whether they need human or automatic moderation for chatrooms; and
- ensure where necessary staff who come into contact with children have had relevant Criminal Records Bureau checks.

The guidance is available at www.police.homeoffice.gov.uk

Protecting Children Online: joint EU / Virtual Global Task Force conference

On 15 and 16 November the EU and the Virtual Global Task Force held a conference in Belfast on protecting children online. Delegates from industry, Government and NGOs discussed a wide range of online child protection issues in plenary sessions and workshops with themes including public awareness, controlling internet content, payment providers, private and public social networks, partnership approaches, the role of NGOs and reporting abuse.

A conference report will be available in the near future – see the next issue of the media literacy bulletin for more details.

Adult learning and media literacy: Cardiff conference

On 17th November 2005, over 70 delegates - from organisations as diverse as Culture Online, the Commission for Racial Equality in Wales, the British Board of Film Classification, the Workers Education Association, HMP Cardiff and the British Educational Communications Technology Agency - gathered at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff for a conference on media literacy.

With the support of Ofcom, the event was organised by NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, and its Welsh counterpart, NIACE Dysgu Cymru, to bring together learning providers to explore and discuss issues around media literacy. The conference considered what media literacy is and how can it be

delivered in formal and informal contexts to adult learners - young, old and in all their diversity.

The opening session saw contributions from Professor Elan Closs Stephens, Chair of S4C Authority - who talked about how we regulate in a multi-platform world; Professor Naomi Sargant, Treasurer of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer and Deputy Chair of Mediawise - described NIACE's research evidence about the learning divide mirroring the digital divide; and Rhodri Williams, Ofcom's Director in Wales, who articulated Ofcom's approach to media literacy.

Participants included college and university practitioners, unions and local government officers. The afternoon was introduced by Professor Justin Lewis, Deputy Head of School at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. He spoke about the links between media literacy, citizenship and globalisation and asked whether we are heading towards a more enlightened media future. Bob Atkins - a course Director at the Cardiff School - then ran a short seminar entitled, 'Media: friend or foe?' before handing over to the closing speaker, Kate Strudwick, Senior Arts Development Officer for Caerphilly County Borough Council, who introduced a series of both moving and amusing digital storytelling pieces created by local residents.

If you would like to receive a copy of Professor Sargant's media literacy research evidence or be kept informed of NIACE's media literacy-related activities for Adult Learners' Week 2006 (20th to 26th May), please e-mail alw@niace.org.uk. You can also order free copies of NIACE's publication, 'And Now Press the Red Button - A Guide to Media Literacy, what it is and why we need to know more about it' at the same e-mail address or by visiting <http://www.niace.org.uk/ALW/2005/Themes/MediaLiteracyGuide.pdf>

Cyber-safety story telling awards ceremony

On 25 November 'Thinktank' the Museum for Science and Industry in Birmingham hosted the 'Safer Internet Magic and Friendship' story telling awards ceremony.

The Story Telling competition and award ceremony have been organised for children and young people as part of a series of pan-European initiatives by the Internet Safety Awareness Network (INSAFE) to raise awareness of internet safety issues.

This initiative was aimed at exploring children's understanding of safe and effective use of internet and other mobile technologies, fostering the creative use of information and communication technology, encouraging innovation and raising awareness of internet safety issues. Prizes for the winning students included notebook computers, digital cameras and MP3 players.

The competition was launched on Safer Internet Day, February 8th 2005 which this year was celebrated by 65 organisations in 30 countries across the world. See page 9 for details of Safer Internet Day 2006.

For further details about the INSAFE network and activities please visit www.saferinternet.org.

'Newsday' on Channel 4

On 29 November Channel 4 ran 'newsday', with students from 9 schools and learning centres across the country working with the Channel 4 News team to produce a news bulletin. Their work was featured on the Channel 4 News and More 4 News, further details – including the bulletin - available online at: www.channel4.com/learning/breakingthenews/index.html

A professional association for media education

At present there is no national professional association for teachers of media in England. An informal steering group of media organisations has been set up by the English and Media Centre (www.englishandmedia.co.uk), with the support of Ofcom and the UK Film Council, to explore possible interest in the association and conduct further research, ahead of a conference in summer 2006.

Interested parties can register their interest at www.mediaedassociation.org.uk

In focus

A year in media literacy

By Andrea Millwood Hargrave*
Millwood Hargrave Ltd, former Research Director of the BSC and ITC

2005 has been the year in which the concept of 'media literacy' has been far less debated than in previous years. Following its consultation in 2004, Ofcom has defined media literacy as 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts'. So, 2005 has been the year in which this concept has been acted upon and initiatives are underway to substantiate the definition, as this brief overview hopes to demonstrate.

It is clear however that the term 'literacy' may run into the danger of being over-used or used without thought. In particular, to symbolise those areas where users are being required to take greater responsibility for their actions and where regulation has previously played a significant role. At the Westminster Media Forum on Media Literacy Professor Sonia Livingstone talked about the 'plethora of different kinds of literacy being proposed' such as media-, health-, financial-, political-, environment-, and emotional literacy. It is vital then, to remain clear about the purposes of media literacy, as defined by Ofcom, and why the Communications Act established this as a core responsibility of the communications regulator.

Important in this evaluation of the purposes of such literacy will be the baseline that Ofcom is establishing in its seminal piece of research which examines both attitudes towards media platforms and the way in which they are currently used by different sections of society in the UK. The data will be publicly available early in 2006 but

* Please note that opinions expressed in items written by third parties are those of the authors and should not be attributed to Ofcom

indications are that the findings, collected from over 4,500 people, will provide a valuable and fascinating data source. It is to be hoped that these can then be used to form the base against which changes in media literacy, among core groups in particular, may be tracked.

Ofcom is unique in collecting baseline information across both 'established' and 'new' media, and across demographic groups. Other projects tend to be focussed on one form of delivery (such as the internet) or on particular demographic groups, such as the young, or on specific areas of media literacy. The Mediapro project (www.mediapro.org), for example, supported by funding by the EU and with nine European partners, is looking at the way in which young people (aged 12-18) use the Internet and other new technologies with a view to advising on appropriate educational practices for teaching about the use of such media. Similarly the European Centre for Media Literacy (ECML, see <http://ecml.pc.unitcatt.it/english/index.html>) while looking across media delivery platforms and across demographic groups, is concentrating on media education as well.

“Ofcom had started the year off with two literature reviews”

Much debate in Europe this year has concentrated on the convergence of technologies and whether regulation should move to embrace the newer media, to create a technologically-neutral framework for the regulation of audiovisual content. We await the *Communication on Media Literacy* promised by the EU, to see what that suggests about convergence. But another department within the EU is considering 'digital literacy'. It is to be seen how this will differ from the media literacy proposals to be suggested.

Often the call for creating a 'media literate' society comes from a concern about the negative implications of the development of newer technologies which makes the potential to access possibly inappropriate or undesirable content easier and, usually, quicker. Having an educated and literate population of users, it is thought, will make less problematic the ability to evaluate such material – or to avoid it. To this end there have been a number of conferences which have included media literacy as part of their recommendations. One such was the EU's Forum on Child Safety and Mobile Phones in June 2005 which called for policy makers, the industry and users to play their role in promoting the appropriate use of the technology.

“In May, Adult Learners' Week took media literacy as a key theme”

Similarly the Council of Europe brought together actors from the new technology worlds to examine how human rights may be protected in the information society (www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/media/). A Declaration on Human Rights in the Information Society, on which the meeting was based, was signed earlier in the year and refers explicitly to computer literacy as a 'fundamental prerequisite' both for enabling access to information and for allowing the full participation of one's cultural rights.

Coming back to the UK, the importance of media literacy was emphatically underscored in an initiative late in the year – the signing of the Media Literacy Charter (www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/filmindustry/ml charter/). The Charter was an

initiative of the Media Literacy Task Force, which includes representatives from the broadcasting and film industries and at which Ofcom is an observer. However, while the Charter has been derived from a 'moving image' perspective, it notes that media literacy extends to all media forms and it too, recognises 'the importance of media literacy in the development of educational, cultural, political, social and economic policy' - a core reason for the inclusion of media literacy within Ofcom's remit. It is to be hoped other such Charters will be signed in other European countries.

Significantly, for the first time this year UK commercial public service broadcasters published details of their media literacy initiatives and programmes as part of their statements of programme policy setting out their public service remits.

**“Public service
broadcasters published
details of their media
literacy initiatives”**

A further initiative, supported by Ofcom this year, was the annual Adult Learners' Week in May, organised by NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education), which took media literacy as its theme. A number of organisations offered activities enabling adults to use different media and to learn how to exploit their potential positively for their own needs. It is to be hoped that such initiatives will be extended and that the broader goals of media literacy, such as those that look at evaluating media content, can be attained over time for this group, most of whom fall outside formal education. NIACE also produced a media literacy guide called 'And now press the red button' (see page 5 for how to order it).

But perhaps the most significant and startling development has been the demonstration of the innate ability of the user to harness new technologies to suit their needs. A survey by the Oxford Internet Institute showed that nearly one fifth of users (18%) post photographs on the net, while almost the same proportion (16%) have distribution lists or inputs into discussion groups and message boards. Fourteen per cent of users say they have a website and a small proportion (5%) keep a blog, a web-based log of comment and opinion on events (www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/oxis/oxis2005_report.pdf). Importantly of course, blogs have no editorial control and the importance of evaluation and the ability to verify content - key skills of the media literate person - become all the more important if users derive their knowledge from such material.

The power of the use of mobile technologies was well-illustrated most recently during the London bombings of July 7. The Tsunami disaster in Asia at the end of last year had brought compelling video footage to screens. But the use of camera phones on July 7 brought events close and directly to the viewer so that, as the Washington Post reported the following day, the world was enabled 'to view news with nearly the immediacy of a victim or eyewitness'. And again, while the traditional media retransmitted those pictures through the various editorial processes put in place to regulate content, footage – unedited – was available to view on the Internet. In

**“Blogs have no
editorial control”**

commenting on this balance between mediated and unmediated content a blogger (www.timporter.com/firstdraft/archives/000468.html) seeks to describe what he now expected from 'traditional media', in this case the press. He argues that 'In a world of digital empowerment and reflexive communication, we are all reporters... [But] the media circus needs a ringmaster - and newspapers can fill that role. ...What do I want in my Wall Street Journal, New York Times and San Francisco Chronicle when I pick them up from the porch tomorrow? I want the type of reporting that professionals can still do better than citizens, but also pointers to the best of the citizen work.' He then

talks of the specific understanding that experienced journalists can bring to the discussion and explanation of such events such as placing them in context - local, national and global, for example. What he is referring to of course, is creating a media environment which draws upon the positive aspects of the established and new technologies and the information they can provide him with.

Ofcom had started the year off with two literature reviews of research into media literacy among children and adults, drawing together the data available on the way in which people used different media and what they understood by them. The year is ending with the signing of a Charter for Media Literacy and the imminent publication of the first comprehensive examination of its kind, looking at people's use of and attitudes towards the media now available to them.

“The year is ending with the signing of a Charter for Media Literacy”

We will understand how people learn to use technologies, but we must also learn much more about the way in which they decipher the content brought to them, so rapidly sometimes, by these technologies. That is still a task to be undertaken. It is also clear from the meetings and seminars and, indeed the funded research programmes such as the Media Programme within the EU (http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/media/index_en.html) that the industry, policy makers and other stakeholders need to become literate across media forms and understand what their role might be in creating a media literate civil society.

Events

European Safer Internet Day 2006

European Safer Internet Day is an initiative of the INSAFE network (www.saferinternet.org/ww/en/pub/insafe/index.htm). The theme of Safer Internet Day in the UK in 2006 will revolve around 'Cyber Wellness' and educating the media. 'Cyberwellness' is a holistic term which encompasses not only concerns around safety and security online, but also considers people's psychological and emotional well-being, stage of development with specific regard to the range of issues that may affect children and young people in their use of new mobile and internet technologies.

In the UK, Safer Internet Day 2006 will be co-ordinated by the Cyberspace Research Unit at the University of Lancashire.

Date: 7 February 2006

Venue: To be confirmed

Contact: Neil Malone (namalone@uclan.ac.uk 01772 894258)

**Every Child Matters: safeguarding children in a digital world
Becta strategy and planning day for directors of children's services**

An opportunity for Director's of Children's Services and/or Chief Education Officers of all Local Authorities in England and their senior staff, to consider:

- The changing risks to children as a result of an increased use of information and communications technology; and
- The challenges and solutions offered by ICT when safeguarding children in their care.

Whilst the focus will be on education, the principles and issues to be discussed will apply equally across all services with children at the focus.

Date: 8 February 2006

Venue: National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham.

Contact: This event is by invitation only in the first instance, should you require further information or would like to register your interest in the event, please visit - www.becta.org.uk/safeguarding

Silver Surfers' Week 2006

Calling all organisations with an internet-ready computer and a front door...

Planning for next year's Silver Surfers' campaign is underway to make it bigger and better than ever - and the organisers are calling on you and your partner organisations to become involved. All you need to do is put a circle in your diary - week beginning 20 May 2006.

Run to coincide with Adult Learners' Week, Silver Surfers' Week involves a huge, nationally run, nationally sponsored range of activity to help older people, who've never experienced the internet before, to get online. You can help by a) committing to holding an event yourself b) inviting your partner organisations (anyone, large or small, who you communicate with) to sign up too.

It's easy to hold a Silver Surfers' event. Register with silver@hairnet.org to make sure you're first in line for a free resource which will tell you all about how to hold one - and keep telling everyone you meet who's over 50, or in touch with over-50s, about it.

Date: 20 - 26 May 2006

Venue: UK-wide

Contact: Bob Holmes, 0870 241 5091, www.silversurfersday.org

About the media literacy bulletin

What is Ofcom?

Ofcom is the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services.

What is media literacy?

We have defined media literacy as the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts. At its simplest level it is the ability to use a range of media and be able to understand the information received. At a more advanced level it moves from recognising and understanding the information to critical thinking skills such as questioning, analysing, appreciating and evaluating that information.

What is Ofcom's role?

Ofcom has a duty under section 11 of the Communications Act 2003 to 'promote media literacy'. We work with stakeholders to help focus on the present and future media literacy needs of all members of society.

Get involved

We want to keep our stakeholders informed about developments in media literacy. Do let us know if you are running an event, undertaking research or have published recently on any aspect of media literacy. We can put information up on our website (www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/) or in our bulletin. If you run or are aware of a media literacy initiative that could be covered in more depth in one of our 'In Focus' articles get in touch. Also let us know if you have colleagues who may be interested in receiving our bulletin.

If you have any other suggestions or feedback for this bulletin contact media.literacy@ofcom.org.uk

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