Lifeblood of democracy?
Learning about broadcast news

A BFI research report for Ofcom

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Foreword

Ofcom’s discussion document last summer (News News, Future News) identified that news is regarded by viewers as the most important of all the PSB genres, and television remains by far the most used source of news for UK citizens. The role of news and information as part of the democratic process is long established, and its status is specifically underpinned in the Communications Act 2003. Ofcom’s discussion paper examined the environment in which television news currently operates, and assesses how that may change in future.

Ofcom research suggests that 94 per cent of people say they use terrestrial television news at some time and 90 per cent agree that it’s important to keep up with the news. But there are indications of a greater level of disconnection to the content of news. Some 55 per cent of people agreed that much of the news on TV was not relevant to them. 16-24 year olds generally claim less interest in news topics than older people and there has been an increase in young people claiming that they only watch news when something important or interesting happens. Young people were less interested in topics including current events, politics or world affairs.

Nevertheless, broadcast news is one of the main ways we find out about the world we live in and the issues we face in modern society. For some, the news is the lifeblood of democracy.

The BBC News School Report is designed to engage 12 and 13 year olds with the news and journalism, by giving them the opportunity to produce and broadcast their own reports. As such it represents a significant contribution to the promotion of media literacy in the UK.

Ofcom and the BBC have a duty to promote media literacy. Ofcom recognises that in a converged media world the balance between traditional media regulation and people taking responsibility for managing their own relationship to content is changing. Ofcom’s Annual Plan for 2008-09 lists the promotion of media literacy as a key priority. We would encourage all stakeholders to consider what contributions they too can make to ensure people have the skills, knowledge and understanding of the media and telecommunications to be better able to benefit from the rich array of content and services available to them.

We would like to thank the authors and bfi for their initiative in proposing this research and the BBC's openness in allowing the authors full access to the project. Scrutiny of a pilot project such as this clearly demonstrates the BBC's willingness to learn from the pilot to make the project as effective in the classroom as possible, and learn as much as possible themselves about young peoples' attitudes toward news and current affairs.

This was an ambitious project to encourage young people to understand the news gathering process and to watch more news. It’s important that a report like this records what Ofcom and the BBC can learn as well as what younger viewers learn when they watch the news.

Philip Graf
Deputy Chair, Ofcom and Chair of Ofcom Content Board

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Learning About Broadcast News – response from the BBC

The BBC welcomes the publication of Lifeblood of Democracy – Learning About Broadcast News and is grateful to Ofcom for providing an opportunity to respond. The primary aim of School Report is to engage 12 and 13 year olds with the news and journalism, by giving them the opportunity to produce and broadcast their own reports. This is against the background of a range of research, including Ofcom’s New News, Future News which highlights the increasing disengagement of young people from news. School Report is a key element of the BBC’s commitment to promote media literacy, particularly in the context of its public purpose of sustaining citizenship and civil society.

This was the first – and pilot year of the School Report project. The approach taken by the BBC was to provide a website with resources, some hands-on support from BBC mentors and the opportunity to be part of a UK wide BBC event – School Report News Day (22nd March 2007). Teachers were not told specifically how to run the project, or with how many students. So the BBC was keen to gather information on how School Report was being run in classrooms and welcomed the opportunity to help the BFI when they were approached about giving access to some of the schools taking part.

While the 3 schools they selected cannot be representative of the 120 schools which took part, the report makes for some very interesting reading. The BBC is pleased that the predominant learning outcomes were around understanding news production, communication skills and enrichment of journalistic skills as this was where the emphasis was placed in the resources provided. The BBC is also delighted to see that a significant number of the students interviewed said that they now watched more TV news, and attributed this directly to their involvement with the project.

We recognise some of the issues raised where the learning outcomes were less developed, in particular about the levels of support teachers need. We will be reviewing our resources at the end of the second year of the project in summer 2008 and we are also exploring ways in which other agencies can provide additional training or support for teachers.

BBC News School Report Team
Summary

BBC News School Report is a project which aims to enable Year 8 (12 and 13 year old) students in UK schools to learn about news production. Over 120 UK schools participated in its pilot year, 2006-7. This report presents the findings of a study funded by Ofcom, which sought to identify and account for learning outcomes generated by the project. The study was proposed and managed by the British Film Institute and was carried out by a team of three researchers between December 2006 and June 2007.

This study was not an evaluation of the School Report project as a whole, but an investigation of learning outcomes for selected students in three case studies, over a period of five months. Although every effort was made to select case study schools that represented a breadth of types of school, the small size of the sample means that the pattern of learning outcomes described here cannot be projected on to the whole of the School Report project.

Nevertheless, the research offers some important insights on teaching and learning about broadcast news. Rather than examining whether the stated learning aims were achieved, the researchers explored all learning outcomes, intended and unintended, using a ‘goals-free’ methodology which enabled students and teachers to respond to unprompted, open questions. Additional, prompted questions were designed to elicit information about the extent to which students had developed their understanding of news and news production, and the impact of the project on other areas of learning and motivation. These questions were derived from three sources: the original project proposal from the BFI; an interview with the project leaders at the BBC, and the stated aims for the project on the BBC News School Report website.

Interview transcripts were analysed using a coding frame that was based on the most salient categories of response. The 20 learning outcomes that were identified through this research thus combined some of the objectives stated at the outset together with some less predictable outcomes that emerged through the interview process.

Concept mapping was also used to provide another perspective on students’ understanding of broadcast news, both before and after the School Report project, and each researcher observed the activity in their case study school on the culminating day of the project, 22nd March 2007. This report thus provides a rich, qualitative account which could make a significant contribution to further stages of the School Report project, and to general curriculum development for media literacy.

The report is in four sections.

**Section 1: The Project and the Research**

This section describes the aims and organisation of the School Report project, the aims and methodology of the research, and key features of the three case study schools including the interviewees and each school’s approach to the project.

**Section 2: Learning Outcomes**

The methods of data collection were: pre- and post-project interviews, observation, and pre- and post-project concept maps. The majority of students and their teachers felt that they had learned something from the project and had valued it. Analysis shows that learning outcomes, while generally reasonable though modest, were strongest in relation to some news production processes and weakest in relation to critical skills and understanding. There
were 8 main learning outcomes. The three strongest and most prevalent of these also related closely to the BBC’s own core objective of helping students to learn how news is made. But there was little or no learning about 12 other outcomes, most of which can be grouped into the area of ‘critical understanding’ of TV news. It is these 12 outcomes that can be seen as relating most closely to the curricular requirements for learning about non-fictional texts within English, and about ‘the role of the media in society’ as part of Citizenship, in Year 8 (see section 3.4, page 67).

Section 3: Factors Contributing to Learning

From analysis of the post-project interviews, the two main factors contributing to learning are identified as ‘New Ground Rules’ (i.e. students finding themselves in a new situation and subject to new imperatives) and classroom lessons on news, based mainly on the BBC website materials. The main factors which seem to have limited some of the learning outcomes are: aims and materials from the BBC which did not offer enough support to teachers with less media teaching expertise; uncertainty about differentiation and expected standards; and a number of problems at school and local level with planning and management, possibly exacerbated by the project’s recruiting strategy.

Section 4: Implications for Policy and Practice

The School Report project is potentially of great value to learners, and its aspiration to reach all Year 8 students shows that the BBC has recognised media literacy as a general entitlement. However, it is suggested that a more explicit commitment to the development of critical understanding is needed in its aims and resources, if the project is to be accepted by the education sector as making a real contribution to curricular objectives. The problem of teacher access to mentors and professional development is addressed, and the extent to which a high-profile News Day may strain school priorities and resources is discussed. The key issue for both the education sector and for Ofcom seems to be a need for more open dialogue and closer collaboration between the education sector and the BBC in order to ensure that the project reaches its full potential.

Notes

Throughout this report, BBC News School Report will be referred to either as ‘the School Report project’ or as ‘the project’.

The report makes every effort to ensure the anonymity of the case study schools and of individual students and teachers. Pseudonyms are not used, because with such a small sample, the risk of identification would be increased.

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Section 1

The Project and the Research

1.1 Introduction

This report describes a qualitative research study which sought to identify and account for the learning outcomes generated in three case study schools by the BBC’s School Report project in its pilot year, 2006-7. This first section is largely descriptive. In the first part (1.2 to 1.4) we describe the School Report project’s origins, aims and organisation. We next explain the background to this research (1.5), and then describe the three case study schools, the students and teachers who were interviewed for the research, and the different ways in which they managed the project (1.6).

1.2 Origins of the Project

When it became clear in 2003 that the forthcoming Communications Act would allocate a responsibility for ‘media literacy’ to the new regulatory body, The Office of Communications (Ofcom), the UK Film Council (UKFC) and the British Film Institute (BFI) set up a Media Literacy Task Force to bring together key stakeholders and to develop the media industry’s understanding of what media literacy could involve. The BBC and Channel Four were invited to join the Task Force, and an Ofcom representative attended meetings as an observer.

At an early stage, the idea of a ‘national schools’ news day’ was mooted by the BFI as a potential collaborative project for all the Task Force members. Channel Four decided to proceed with the idea independently, as a pilot project for Key Stages 3 to 5, with 8 schools and a community media organisation, during the autumn term of 2005. The BBC then developed their own project for Year 8 students, for a larger number of pupils, to run from autumn 2006. This would involve schools using BBC resources to help them teach about news, ideally throughout the year, but there would be a profile-building high point in the form of a UK-wide News Day in March 2007.

1.3 The BBC’s Aims for the Project

The BBC’s aims for the project as expressed on the BBC News School Report website are:

BBC News School Report gives 12- and 13-year-olds from UK schools the chance to make their own TV, radio or online news at school and to broadcast it via the internet. Using lesson plans and materials from this website, and with support from BBC staff, teachers help students develop their journalistic skills and become School Reporters.

A more extended list of aims is provided in the FAQs section of the site, as follows:

As well as engaging students with broadcast journalism, we also aim to:

- Interest young audiences in news of all sorts, and the world around them

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ii http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/5273684.stm
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- Support learning in schools by leaving a legacy of skills and understanding relating to journalism, such as critical thinking, research and communication
- Provide the opportunity for students to consider the responsibilities involved in producing and publishing/broadcasting their own content
- Provide BBC audiences with an opportunity to hear the stories which are important to young people from different parts of the country
- Strengthen links between the BBC and local communities

The site states that the School Report work will contribute to the curricular requirements for English, Citizenship and PHSE in all four UK nations, and the relevant requirements are listed on the website.

At the start of the project, we interviewed two of the project leaders at the BBC who identified for us a further and more detailed list of aims. These were that every participating student would

ii) see their own work on screen
iii) learn that news is exciting and relevant for their lives
iv) understand and internalise public service journalism values
v) understand where news stories come from
vi) watch more news and engage with it more
vii) understand that news is made, and that there is a purpose behind the way it is made
viii) understand the importance of accuracy in the news.

Beyond this, they were fairly cautious about the capacity of students to engage with concepts such as fact and opinion, bias and objectivity, although they knew that these are part of the curricular requirements for Key Stage 3 English. Their overall concern was to make the project widely accessible, and in the longer term scaleable so that all Year 8 children in the UK could have access to it. The primary focus of the BBC’s aims for the project were thus that it should enable students to make their own news material in a radio, TV or web format, and to have it seen or heard by others. But it was also clear that there were deeper and more ambitious aims which drove the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff we interviewed:

I think the news is the absolute life blood of democracy and it sounds incredibly grand to put it like that, but I think that if you’re not informed you can’t participate in a full way and you’re disempowered.

The inclusion of the News Day was an important factor for the BBC in terms of securing a high profile for the project, both internally and externally. Our interviewees were well aware that there was an element of risk to the BBC’s reputation if the project were to meet with

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ii [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/5273684.stm#1](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/5273684.stm#1)
iv [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/5283094.stm#2](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/5283094.stm#2)
serious problems, especially on the News Day itself. A small team had been assembled to manage the project and a two-year budget agreed. Their other concerns at this early stage were that:

- content produced by some schools might not be suitable for uploading to websites due to copyright and other legal constraints;
- a breaking story on the day might remove the BBC’s support services to schools;
- teachers might well use copyright material, despite BBC guidance to the contrary;
- the requirement to share students’ work in the public sphere would probably have an inhibiting effect on teachers’ level of adventurousness.

1.4 Organisation of the Project

The BBC was keen to ensure maximum inclusiveness by recruiting schools from all parts of the UK and with different levels of prior interest and expertise, in order to demonstrate the scalability of the project. They were also keen to see it embedded in school curricula and involving large numbers of Year 8 students. The first year was intended as a pilot year and initially planned to involve only 60 schools; this later expanded to 120. Schools were to be supported through the website, through a package of materials sent to all participating schools, and through the provision of BBC news professionals as mentors to every school.

1.4.1 Recruitment

The BBC recruited their pilot schools by a variety of routes: some via BBC local radio stations (as these stations already had a pre-existing relationship with local schools). To ensure social diversity and a wide ability range, they approached a number of City Learning Centres (CLCs) which are all based in areas of significant social disadvantage. The CLCs were asked to coordinate groups of schools in their areas and to enable their participation in the project. The BBC also worked with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) to recruit schools specialising in humanities, and with the BFI to reach Specialist Media Arts Colleges. Some schools approached the BBC directly as they had heard about the project and wanted to be involved. A few special schools were recruited; for example a school for students with hearing impairments.

A condition of inclusion in the project was that all schools should be prepared to share their project outcomes publicly on the BBC website, or the school’s own website. Beyond this, the BBC did not seek to impose further conditions on how schools undertook the project. They recognised that many schools would be taking it on as a ‘taster’ with one class or a few students, before deciding whether to embed it in the KS3 curriculum longer term.

1.4.2 Project Support

The BBC set up a Schools Report website offering six lesson plans and other guidance in order to support schools wishing to participate. This received in excess of 1000 hits per day, and for a time became the third most emailed site on News Online. In addition, participating schools were sent two DVDs: one containing a short montage of clips and music promoting School Report; the other containing a number of TV and radio news items together with sets of clips from these items that could be downloaded and edited by students, and opening and closing title sequences for both radio and TV, which students could use for their own news items.
Mentors were allocated to those schools who had registered for the project directly with the BBC, and to participating CLCs. The latter in turn had to manage contact between these mentors and their group of schools. About 80 per cent of the mentors were from a journalism background, the other 20 per cent being from a range of BBC departments including News, Sports, Children’s TV, and Nations & Regions. A few were production specialists such as directors, editors or camera operators. Mentors were invited to apply to the project in writing and had to be released by their line managers. Clearly, mentors’ professional responsibilities had to come first and it was not always straightforward to find dates convenient to both schools and mentors. However, they had to commit to two days on the project: the pilot day and the news day, and a day of training was offered. It was also intended that teachers would have regular contact via email from a member of the BBC project team, but the limitations of many teachers’ access to e-mail meant that this could not be used as much as the BBC had hoped.

1.4.3 Timescale

The project began in the autumn term of 2006. It became increasingly apparent that enabling all schools to work towards a News Day on 22nd March 2007 involved a very tight timetable, given that schools needed time to make their initial decision about whether to participate, and then to allocate staff and students and plan curriculum time, as well as prepare their actual lessons, from a standing start early in the autumn term. Recruitment of schools went on throughout much of the autumn term, and some schools thus did not start until the Spring Term 2007.

Schools were encouraged to participate in pilot News Days: in part this enabled the BBC to plan for the News Day itself by anticipating the kinds of problem that could emerge, but schools that did participate were also able to use them as rehearsals. BBC staff visited pilot days and evaluated how well they had worked.

1.5 The Research

The BFI’s Education Department had a commitment to research as part of its national role as an advocate for moving image media literacy. As part of the BFI’s involvement with the Media Literacy Task Force, there had been continuing dialogue with the BBC as the School Report project evolved, and the BBC was keen that the BFI should be able to undertake independent research on the learning outcomes achieved in the pilot year. A proposal, Learning About TV News, was submitted to Ofcom who agreed to fund the study.

The research proposal was linked to Special Effects, an existing research project, undertaken by the NFER and funded by Creative Partnerships, with two BFI staff as part of the research team, which sought to identify the distinctive learning outcomes associated with creative moving image media work by children in Key Stages 1-3. Like Special Effects, Learning About TV News drew for its methodology on earlier research by John Harland and the NFER, such as The Arts-Education Interface: A Mutual Learning Triangle? (Harland et al 2005) which has explored the relationship between young people, teachers and schools, and artists and art organisations, and the factors influencing learning outcomes in arts-based interventions in schools. For more on the findings of Special Effects, see section 4.3, page 79.
1.5.1 Research Objectives

The objective of the research was to explore the actual learning about news that took place during the School Report project. For reasons of manageability, but also because the BFI’s remit is for moving image media, the research proposal focused on TV news only; though because some students worked mainly on radio broadcasts, once underway the research had to be broadened to include radio. The proposal set out to document all students’ learning, as well as identifying some specific learning objectives which were seen and endorsed by the BBC team:

- understanding how TV news programmes are made;
- understanding some of the key concepts governing TV news production (such as news values, balance and impartiality, ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news, production processes, political and ethical constraints, audience expectations and responses, public service broadcasting);
- raising students’ political awareness as citizens, making them more likely to participate in democratic processes as they grow older.

The proposal also identified three outcomes which could affect the development of policy:

- For the BBC, evidence about the ways in which young people can best be helped towards a better understanding of TV news and its role in national and global events.
- For the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), identifying ways in which education for media literacy can be most effectively built into the new school curriculum from 2008.
- For Ofcom, evidence about the ways in which formal education can affect the development of trust and understanding of news media.

1.5.2 Research Methodology and Timescale

The study adopted a ‘goals-free’ methodology: that is, it was not restricted to examining whether the stated learning aims were achieved but instead set out to explore all learning outcomes, intended and unintended. This was a qualitative, not a quantitative study, so it used a small sample of learners in order to collect an extensive amount of data from which it was hoped to find evidence not only about what was learnt, but also about the factors that may have influenced the learning outcomes, including accounting for outcomes that may have been different to that expected. Given the relatively limited budget, only three case study schools could be selected.

Three methods of collecting data were used:

- interviews with six students and at least one member of staff in each school before and after the project took place;
- observation of student activity on the News Day itself;
- concept mapping exercises with a whole class both before and after the project.
More detail on these three methods can be found in Section 2. The BBC staff leading the project were interviewed at an early stage. Post-project interviews were held with the Centre Manager of a CLC with which one of the case study schools worked, and with a teacher coordinator at a Media Arts College who was the point of contact for another case study school. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The research project began in the autumn term 2006 with a lengthy process of selection to find three case study schools representing a diverse range of location, type and intake. Because it was necessary to interview students before they began the School Report project, we could only select schools that would be starting in the Spring Term 2007. The baseline interviews took place between December and February 2007; observations were carried out on 22nd March, and the post-project interviews took place between April and June. Data analysis was completed by the end of July and the report delivered to Ofcom at the end of August 2007.

1.5.3 Selection of Case Study Schools

The BBC’s list of schools which were likely to participate in the project was used by the research team to identify 35 possible schools that would be available to take part in the research. This was initially based on type of school/college and geographical location. The research team then undertook its own analysis using the Ofsted and DfES Standards websites, to collect data on factors we thought of significance as markers of social diversity. These factors were: numbers of students receiving free school meals; percentage of ethnic minority students and those with English as an Additional Language; numbers of students with Special Needs; the percentage of students achieving 5 GCSE grades A-C. We also sought to achieve regional diversity and an urban/rural mix, although given the limitations of the budget we decided to limit the study to England. We agreed to exclude all single sex and independent schools, given the very small number of case studies. We then asked the BBC to make initial contact with the resulting shortlist of 13 schools, followed up with telephone conversations to ascertain the extent to which the schools were definitely participating in the project, and in particular, and if possible focusing on TV news (as opposed to news in any other medium). By this method we reduced the potential sample down to a final three.

1.6 The Case Study Schools

The three schools selected as case studies for the research were:

- A mixed comprehensive school in an urban area. A low achieving school academically (according to Ofsted), with an all white intake from a socially disadvantaged area. This school was one of three selected by the local Specialist Media Arts College to work with them on the project, using as a base the CLC based in the College.

- A mixed comprehensive school in a city suburb with specialist sports status, and one of seven schools selected by the local CLC. More than 90 per cent of the student intake is from ethnic minorities: predominantly South Asian, and from Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu cultural backgrounds. The local community is stable though not prosperous and the school is ‘improving’ (according to Ofsted) with reasonably good results at GCSE.

- A mixed 11-18 Specialist College in a rural market town with an all white intake. The school has both specialist sport and media status and the area is relatively
prosperous. The school has reasonably good results at GCSE and received a 'good/outstanding' Ofsted report in 2000.

1.6.1 Students’ Backgrounds

The researchers interviewed 6 Year 8 (i.e. 12 or 13 year old) students in each school, before and after the project. They were selected by the school to provide a gender and ability balance. Interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

In the baseline interviews, students were asked about the media technology devices they owned or had access to at home, such as TV, computers, DVD players, MP3 players, radios, mobile phones and computer and video games. All the students had access to TV at home, but numbers of sets varied, with the students from the school with a large ethnic minority intake having fewer on average, with only one of these having a TV in his/her bedroom. The students from the other two schools had between two and 6 TVs at home, with 11 of them having TVs in their bedrooms; 8 of these had DVD players in their bedrooms as well.

Sixteen of the 18 students interviewed at baseline had access to computers at home: of these, four had a computer in their bedrooms. Most had broadband access, though one had no internet access at home at all. The most commonly owned technologies were MP3 players (16 students had them – though of these, one was shared with a sister and one was owned but apparently not used) and mobile phones, owned by 16 students, 9 of whom had ‘extras’ such as cameras in their phones.

Students’ ‘most used’ technologies varied quite widely. Most named at least two as their favourites, with computers (either for e-mail or internet) the most popular but TV coming a close second. Those who had less access to other technologies tended to use their phones the most. These findings are broadly compatible with those of Ofcom’s Media Literacy Audit published in May 2006 which looked at children’s ownership and usage of media technologies.

According to the teachers, the students in each school had done some prior learning about news in the form of newspaper front pages in Year 7:

In particular Year 7, one of their modules on media they have to produce a front page for a tabloid newspaper and it needs to be on something that has been in the news at the moment or recently.

We have got things like newspaper front pages that kind of thing, writing an article, that sort of thing, would be pretty standard fare. Looking at newspaper articles in terms of facts and opinions and bias objectivity that sort of thing we would cover, but not… more for the linguistic element, how can we tell this is bias, how can we tell this is subjective?

In addition, one school had a daily in-house radio bulletin to which every student had to contribute at least once a year; all students also had the option of getting more involved in news work in their spare time, by helping to produce the daily print bulletin or termly newspaper (which is distributed to 5000 readers locally): two of the case study students were involved in this activity.

In two schools, ICT lessons had ensured that students were at ease with using PCs and laptop computers, producing PowerPoint slides and pie charts, but they had little
familiarity with moving image editing software or using cameras. In the other school ICT access seemed to be somewhat less. None of the pupils had had any previous experience of studying TV news or indeed of any critical work on moving image media. None of the pupils told us that they had used their computers for creative activities with moving images or sound.

Overall, the case study schools and their students presented the level of diversity in background and prior learning that the researchers had hoped for.

1.6.2 Teachers’ Prior Experience and Expectations

The teachers who led the pre-News Day activities in each school were interviewed before the start of the project and asked about their plans, their own prior experience in media teaching, and their expectations about what the students would learn on the project. One was accompanied by her Head of Department; the rest were interviewed on their own.

All three were English teachers and relatively new to their schools: one had started at the school that year, while the others were both in their second years at their respective schools. One of these was also new to teaching, having trained as a mature student. The two more experienced teachers had posts of responsibility in their schools: one was a Year 9 year head, the other responsible for Gifted and Talented students. Apart from one of the three who had done some video and editing work, none of them had had any training for media teaching, although the least experienced one was also teaching media as part of English at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. None had had any specific training for the project and were not aware of the mentor system; none had yet looked at the website materials and one was not aware that there was a website.

All three teachers had positive expectations about the project and thought the students would enjoy it, without being very clear about what would be involved:

...because it is something that they are familiar with, it's something that they are bombarded with every day and they will pick up snippets. They may not watch all the news and stuff like that, but they know what goes on.

I think the kids who have been chosen to go are going to enjoy it and get something out of it. I think it will be a really nice thing for them to do. I think it will go well; I'm not entirely sure what's going to be the end product or what they are going to have achieved.

I know that class and I know that they are very committed and enthusiastic and they work very hard. I'm quite prepared for some lessons to go horribly wrong which is fine, because it's new. But I'm equally prepared for some lessons to be fantastic, because they constantly surprise me with how fab they are.

Given that they were interviewed at an early stage of the project before they had had time to start their real planning, their expectations about learning outcomes were relatively general. A teacher from one school, and the Department Head from another, both saw the project as much in terms of transferable skills as about learning that would be specific to news media:
I hope they learn some work-related skills as well as just school work, you know, the idea of what’s actually in the media. And the opportunities that there are, because it isn’t just newspapers, it’s all sorts of things. It’s very good for developing their speaking skills… and team-working, work-related skills, like it’s really important. Not just the academic thing, they learn many other skills which are really important aren’t they? To be able to talk and to handle things and to understand bias and stuff like that.

I would also say that you know given the students that have been chosen I think the development of their speaking and listening skills, their language skills, being able to talk to each other and express their ideas and in an environment that’s a little bit different to the classroom. I’m hoping that’s going to happen.

The Department Head’s colleague endorsed this approach but also added an account very close to the BBC’s core aims:

I hope that the kids will become aware of how news is actually put together in terms of they’re used to just seeing the news on the telly when they’re sitting in their front room. And what I think they’re going to learn is the process behind that, going right back to the research and interviewing people and putting it together and then it becoming an actual broadcast.

However, the teacher who was already teaching media brought some more specific, news-related expectations to the project, based in part on her own experience:

…way back in my dim and distant past I studied news making in Northern Ireland and I found it absolutely fascinating and I actually I couldn’t believe I’ve managed to get so old without realising that news is selective and edited and actually decided by somebody. And I actually find it extremely interesting how political the news can be. So obviously I’m not going to politicise in Year 8, but I was very, very interested….I would really love them to come away just with some glimmer of understanding that news is manipulated really. The other skills that the scheme will bring are things that are always been built on which is the collaborative element, group work, thinking skills, you know all of those sorts of things, speaking and listening skills. So it should enhance what they’re already doing throughout the school year. But what I would really like them to be able to do is look at the news and go, ‘why is that there? And why is that not being said?’ And stuff like that, so just really getting them to question, have a question mark appear above their head and go ‘mnm’ that would be fantastic. It might be wishful thinking, I don’t know, but that would be great.

The same teacher was keen to see the project form a basis of a long term commitment to the study of news in Key Stage 3:

In terms of school-wide, what I would like to see is maybe something that comes out of it that we could develop and use as a scheme with materials that can be used for all of Year 8. And then maybe for next year’s Year 7, it will be refined for them. So actually what the school could get out of it, is a package of materials that they could
use year on year and refine, and therefore the idea of television news becomes part of our curriculum. Rather than an add-on, we could maybe integrate it.

Considering these expectations in relation to the larger aspirations of the project as described in 1.3, or to the KS3 English requirements\(^v\) it is possible to see some of these elements in the teachers’ comments, but also a strong emphasis on other aspects of learning, characteristic of rationales for special projects which are seen as valuable but not closely related to the curriculum or other specific learning outcomes.

1.6.3 Case Study Schools’ Project Management

Each of the three case study schools organised the project in a different way. The crucial differentiating factor was their decision on who was to be involved in the News Day itself, and the extent to which other Year 8s were to be involved in learning about news at all. Another factor was the manageability of the project, and the level of planning that was feasible in the time available.

1.6.3.1 Selection of Students

Each school selected a small number of students to be involved in the News Day activities, rather than committing a whole class or year group. In two of the schools these groups (10 students at one school; 9 at the other) went off-site to the local CLC, not only for the News Day but also for two prior visits. Both these groups were carefully mixed in terms of ability, but there did appear to be an element of reward for good behaviour or ‘trying hard’ governing who got chosen. In the other school, some 20 students were selected for production activities on News Day, working on-site in the school’s own radio and TV studios. In this case the selection appeared to have been done by the school’s specialist media staff choosing students who were experienced in news production work and could be relied upon.

1.6.3.2 Classroom Teaching about News

Two of the schools also planned for a unit of work on news for a larger number of Year 8 students. At one of the CLC-linked schools, all the Year 8s (9 classes, approximately 240 students) had six lessons – two in PSHE/Citizenship, four in English – in school during one week, led by English and PHSE teachers/form tutors, using the BBC website lesson plans and videos. At the Media Arts College, a teacher was asked to provide her Year 8 top set for English one lesson per week on news throughout the Spring Term, based on the BBC website materials. Some of these students were involved in News Day activities, but other participants on the day came from several other classes.

At the other CLC-linked school, in-school teaching was limited to two brief sessions with the selected students pulled out of other lessons: the students also attended the partner school, with an English teacher, for two full days before News Day, during which they were taught some of the BBC-derived material by the partner school staff. The case study school’s teacher was not involved in planning for these off-site days.

\(^v\) For example, that students should learn how to:
- Select, compare and synthesise information from different texts.
- Evaluate how information is presented.
- Sift the relevant from the irrelevant, and distinguish between fact and opinion, bias and objectivity. (National Curriculum English, KS3, Reading)
For all three schools therefore, the curriculum location was predominantly English, with this being the subject specialism of all the teachers involved. All taught some media in KS3 – as required by the National Curriculum – and in the CLC-linked school which ran the week of news lessons, form tutors would regularly introduce media-related issues in the context of PHSE/Citizenship. In the Media Arts College, media teaching was more firmly established throughout the English curriculum, with each unit of work including a ‘media’ dimension.

1.6.3.3 Activities on News Day

As explained in 1.6.3.1, the activities on News Day involved relatively small numbers of students from each school. They were also devised and managed by people other than those students’ usual teachers.

In one case study, the two pilot days functioned as rehearsals for News Day, so that by 22nd March the students and their teachers were familiar with the tasks they were going to do. The CLC Centre Manager who led the planning for the day had previously managed the press-based News Days established by the Times Educational Supplement, and ran the TV News Days on similar lines: students worked in pairs to research and script a news item on a topic of their own choosing, which they later read out to camera. Students were then able to work on MovieMaker software to trim their item and ‘book-end’ it with the opening and closing title sequences provided by the BBC. This was a deliberately modest plan based on his estimate of what could reasonably be achieved in one day, and it did result in all the students completing something by the end of the day, despite problems with the software:

One of the things we tried to focus on was to make sure each child had an outcome from the day so they have that sense of achievement, whether that’s a small radio bulletin or whether that’s a news item.

In another case study, the news production activities were planned by the school’s specialist media staff and took place in the school’s own radio and TV studios, using teams of experienced and trusted students. Large numbers of other students were involved in events and activities that effectively created content for their news teams: the public launch of an environmental project with two external partners; a film event staged by older students; and a dance performance. The Day thus became a more elaborate and ambitious extension of the school’s established practice of news production, with the only real innovation being the involvement of Year 8 students in TV and video work, with the assistance of older students.

The third case study hit some problems on their second visit to the CLC at their partner school, with confusion between the two teachers involved, about timing and roles. On this day, the case study school was relegated to working on radio news. Significant problems then arose on News Day. The case study school group arrived at what they thought was the agreed time but found that an early morning filming session with the local BBC news team had already begun and that they were excluded; they were then informed that they could not participate in any of the other TV news activity for that day, apparently because they had different uniforms from the students who had already been filmed. They were obliged to prepare and record their own news items, planned ad hoc and inevitably not completed by the end of the day.
1.6.3.4 Planning Issues and Problems

All three of the case study schools were working within tight timescales in order to meet the demands of the News Day. Inevitably, a number of problems emerged because of this, often involving failure of communication between participants. These were particularly acute for one school (as explained above) but also affected the other two to some extent, and were clear to the research team both in the observation visits and in the post-project interviews.

One key issue appeared to be a failure to ‘cascade’ information and resources to partner schools. This resulted in confusion over booked dates, and partner schools not benefiting from services such as mentoring. Teachers in these schools felt themselves to be ‘at the end of the food chain’, and there seems to have been no joint planning or discussion of learning objectives between partner schools.

Another key issue appeared to be visits from BBC news teams on News Day to all three of the case study schools, which were set up with very little advance notice. This gave schools and CLCs little time to plan how they would manage the additional demands of such visits – and indeed little sense of what such demands would be. As observers on the day, the researchers were able to monitor the impact of these visits. The offer of media coverage inevitably presents school managers with an important opportunity to publicise their school, which in the current competitive climate in education may be hard to resist. However, such visits can be highly intrusive, with the media professionals making substantial demands on staff, students and resources. In all three of our case studies, the presence of news teams caused noticeable disruption to the schools’ plans for the day, and were detrimental to the project’s key educational processes and objectives. Nevertheless, students at the two schools who did appear in live broadcasts on the day were thrilled to see themselves on TV, and in some cases learnt things from seeing media professionals at work, as we will show in Section 3.

References


Section 2

Learning Outcomes

2.1 Introduction

Examining the students’ learning outcomes generated by the BBC School Report project was always seen as a central area of enquiry for this research. As set out in the proposal for the study, the researchers envisaged that the research ‘will identify what young people actually do learn from a project such as this’. In addition to documenting the learning outcomes achieved by participating students, the brief for the study included a commitment to investigate whether specific themes featured in students’ learning. These comprised:

- raised political awareness as citizens, with increased likelihood of future participation in democratic processes;
- enhanced understanding of news;
- any shifts in the development of young people’s trust in the news media;
- its potential effect on some students’ disaffection with school; and
- associated effects such as improvements in literacy and motivation.

Furthermore, while the study adopted a ‘goals-free’ methodology (i.e. it was not restricted to examining whether the stated learning aims were achieved but instead explored all learning outcomes, intended and unintended), the researchers endeavoured to ensure that the BBC’s particular learning goals for the School Report project were also within the study’s remit. At the outset, these were described in the research proposal as:

- to learn about how news programmes are made, and to understand some of the key concepts governing news production, such as news values, balance and impartiality, ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news, production processes, political and ethical constraints, audience expectations and responses, public service broadcasting, and so on.

In the absence of significant investments in the learning of other participants (e.g. teacher development or school improvement), the realisation of the desired objectives for students’ learning constituted the main rationale and justification for the project. Consequently, examining the extent to which these objectives were met is both a principal concern for the research and a suitable starting point for the presentation of its findings. In this section, we explore the scale and nature of students’ learning so that in the following section we can consider what key factors and processes may account for the learning outcomes that students did and did not achieve.

The presentation of the results is prefaced by a brief description of the research methods used to collect evidence on students’ learning outcomes (2.2). This is followed by three main sub-sections: the scale and level of learning outcomes (2.3); the main observed learning and effects (2.4); aims and areas of learning that were rarely and barely realised. The section closes with a summary and conclusion (2.5).
2.2 Collecting evidence on learning outcomes

Four main research methods were used to garner evidence of the School Report project’s impact on students' learning:

- ii) concept mapping
- iii) pre- and post-project interview items
- iv) retrospective open-ended interview item
- v) retrospective prompted items on learning in specific areas

Each of these is described in turn.

2.2.1 Concept mapping

Concept mapping was used to gauge students’ understanding and perceptions of news before and after the BBC project. A concept map is a diagram that denotes the conceptual structure of a topic as a graphic form in which nodes represent concepts and connecting lines represent the cognitive links between them (McGowen and Tall, 1999). The use of concept maps as a research technique has been widely used in science education (Novak, 1990; Lambiotte and Dansereau, 1991; Wolfe & Lopez, 1993) and in mathematics education (Laturno, 1993; Park & Travers, 1996; McGowen and Tall, 1999). The technique has also been used in studies of the impact of continuing professional development on teachers’ understanding of the key concepts under study (e.g. Trent at al., 1998).

The type of concept mapping used in our research is known as ‘hierarchical concept mapping’ (e.g. see Kinchin, 1998) and was developed for a 12-year study of children’s understanding of science concepts by Joseph Novak and his colleagues (Novak and Musonda, 1991). For us, the technique offered a means of collecting data on young people’s constructs, understanding, images and biases around the concept of the news immediately before involvement in the project and between one and two months after it. The completed pre- and post-maps could then be used to examine changes in students’ constructions and to explore the possible impact of the project and related work in the schools on any perceptual shifts over time.

Across the three schools, 57 students completed both pre- and post-project concept maps. In two schools the students mapped out their images of the concept, ‘TV News’; in the third they depicted what they understood by the concept ‘News’. At the first session, following an explanation and illustration of hierarchical concept mapping, the students drew practice diagrams for concepts like ‘food’ or ‘music’. The researchers attempted not to predicate students’ thinking around the concepts of ‘TV news/news’ and stressed that they could describe their perceptions of the initial concept through whatever descriptors they preferred. They were also encouraged to develop their maps by working through a number of versions. In the post-project session, researchers were careful not to suggest that students should incorporate any learning from the project – they were simply invited to draw their perceptions of the same concept again.

To prepare the 114 maps for analysis, we coded and quantified the type of narratives or themes used by students in their drawings. Examples of these narrative types included news domains (e.g. sport, weather, politics), locations (international, local), news appraisals (e.g. good/bad, interesting/boring) and target audiences (e.g. adult,
The pre- and post-maps were then examined for evidence of change in terms of:

- increases in the number of narrative types registered;
- progression from fairly superficial types (e.g. gender of presenters) to relatively more sophisticated ones (e.g. types of reporting – headlines, breaking news, interviews); and
- signs of progression within and between the narrative types towards the desired learning objectives.

2.2.2 Pre- and post-project interview items

As an alternative way of exploring possible learning by students, the interview schedule used at the follow-up visits to schools repeated 6 questions that had been put to the student interviewees at the baseline stage. Whereas the previous data collection method worked through a visual medium, this second technique provided oral evidence for analysis. The 6 questions were:

- When I interviewed you last time, I asked you how you would explain what news is to an intelligent alien. How would you explain it now?
- As you may know, the person in charge of selecting the news that goes into a TV news broadcast is called an ‘editor’ – like an editor of a newspaper. What do you think an editor of a TV news broadcast has to be good at?
- What TV programmes would you count as news?
- Who are the main news programmes for?
- Do you think it is important to watch the news?
- Do you believe what you see and hear on the news?

Comparative data collected through these items is available for 15 of the 18 student interviewees – in one school it was not possible to interview three of the students who had been interviewed at the baseline stage. The responses to these items were compared with their baseline answers for signs of change and shifts in emphasis.

2.2.3 Retrospective open-ended interview item

In addition to collecting comparative baseline and post-project data, self-reported accounts were also garnered from students and teachers. All the student interviewees at the follow-up stage were invited to describe what, if anything, they felt they had learnt through the School Report project. The initial open-ended question was ‘do you think that you’ve learnt anything through doing this project?’ If students replied in the affirmative, they were asked, ‘what do you think you’ve learnt or got out of it?’ The students were encouraged to give as many examples of their perceived learning as they could. They were also asked, ‘do you think the project has made any difference to you as a person?’ The interviews with teachers in each school included corresponding versions of these questions. The data volunteered in response to these open-ended items were analysed though a coding frame consisting of the most frequently reported categories of learning outcomes.
2.2.4 Retrospective prompted items on learning in specific areas

Following the above open-ended questions, all interviewees were invited to consider whether the project had impacted on their learning in pre-selected specified areas. Such prompted items included questions on:

- how news broadcasts are made
- audience expectations
- social and political acceptability
- BBC values
- literacy and oracy skills
- journalistic skills
- links to the school's media education curriculum
- attitude and motivation towards school in general
- political awareness, informed citizenship
- changes in TV news viewing habits
- changes in other TV programme viewing
- changes in listening to radio

The resultant data were analysed through a coding frame of the most salient categories of response. Where the responses to each of these items were sufficiently numerous and varied, categories of sub-types were devised and used to code up the comments. For example, the first of the above types of outcome, ‘how news broadcasts are made’ was found to contain around 5 or 6 sub-types including observations on ‘the whole process of putting the news together’, ‘realisations about how challenging and demanding the process can be’, ‘the scripting process’ and learning tasks to do with ‘pace and timing’.

2.3 The scale of students’ learning outcomes

Before addressing the question of what students did and did not learn, we first consider the level and scale of students’ learning. Taking the evidence from the four sources as a whole, the level of learning generated by the project, albeit significant for a minority, was modest for the majority of students. This finding can be seen in the data to emerge from the four methods.

2.3.1 Concept maps

Of the 57 students who completed pre- and post-project concept maps, only five produced diagrams that were consistent with significant levels of learning (see Table 2.1). At least one of these pupils came from each school. As an illustration of this degree of learning, Fig. 1 shows the pre-project (Fig. 1a) and post-project (Fig. 1b) concept maps by ‘Student A’. The pre-project map can be seen to be limited to just three narrative elements: location types (i.e. ‘country news’ and ‘abroad news’); news
domains (i.e. ‘parliament’, ‘political’, ‘musical’); and types of stories (e.g. ‘terrorists’, ‘bombing’). In the follow-up map the range of examples of story types is broadened but, more importantly, the number and complexity of narrative types are extended to ten. The new categories include: programmes (Newsround); audience types (kids’ news); different media (newspapers, radio); newspaper types (The Times, Daily Mail); types of reporting (headline story, newslines); different channels (ITV, BBC); and editorial aspects (e.g. editors and finding information, reliable and unreliable information). The latter categories suggest that this student has taken on board some of the key concepts and issues raised by the project and its host curriculum. While these editing and reporting categories were also evident in some of the follow-up maps of the other four students who demonstrated significant learning gains, they seldom appeared in the maps of other students.

The concept maps of a further 19 students signalled slight or moderate degrees of learning (see Table 2.1). Whereas the maps produced by the students deemed to be strong learners generally showed an increase of between three and 7 narrative types, those considered to signal moderate learning usually displayed an increase of just one or two categories. Also, they tended to incorporate only isolated examples – indeed, if any at all – of the sought-after concepts.

**Table 2.1 Levels of learning displayed in concept maps**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maps showing ....</th>
<th>N =</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>significant levels of learning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moderate levels of learning</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negligible levels of learning</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Fig 1a Pre-project concept map by ‘Student A’

Fig 1b Post-project concept map by ‘Student A’
As an example of a moderate project learner, Figs. 2a and 2b present another student's maps (‘Student B’). This student’s baseline map (Fig. 2a) comprised two narrative themes: news appraisals (i.e. news that ‘can be good or bad’, ‘parents can’t cope’) and types of stories (e.g. ‘new baby’, ‘promotion’). In her post-project map (Fig. 2b), apart from adding more examples within the story types category and attributing causes and effects to them, she has alluded only to one other narrative type with brief references to location types (‘international’ and ‘local’ news stories). Some other students characterised as moderate learners produced follow-up maps that extended their baseline diagrams by two narrative types, but they still fell some way short of the learning gains exhibited by those classified as significant learners. Two students drew post-project maps that had fewer narrative types than their
baseline ones but, because their second attempts included concepts that mirrored the desired learning objectives, they have been included in this group of learners. One added journalistic (e.g. ‘research’) and reporting (e.g. ‘interviews’) concepts, while the other cited production process aspects (e.g. ‘putting it together’, ‘keeping it simple and clear’).

A majority of the students’ maps (33 students) showed negligible degrees of learning (see Table 2.1). These maps tended to fall into two types:

- Pairs of maps that were very similar, showing little, if any, increase in the number of narrative types presented and no convincing advancement towards the learning objectives sought. Very often the follow-up maps amounted to little more than re-presentations of the baseline drawings; these included a number of students who, having demonstrated awareness of some of the key learning concepts at the pre-project stage, did not extend these, either quantitatively or qualitatively, in their follow-up maps.

- Cases where the follow-up maps had fewer narrative types than the baseline ones and where there were no significant enhancements in the quality of concepts offered within the reduced number of types. For example, the number of narrative types in one student’s maps declined from 6 at the baseline stage (i.e. channels, number of presenters, gender of presenters, whether s/he viewed it or not, news appraisals (boring) and news domains) to only two at post-project stage (i.e. location types and news domains).

For a number of reasons (e.g. possible memory loss, limited experience in using concept maps, lower motivation levels at the follow-up stage – though there was no consistent evidence of this) it would be reasonable to expect the concept maps to under-estimate the amount of learning to a certain extent. Nevertheless, it should not be thought that the concept maps have under-valued the learning outcomes to a substantial degree. It was our impression that the students worked hard on the follow-up maps; most enjoyed the project and, if anything, there was a built-in bias which would normally have predisposed students to demonstrating what they had learnt through the School Report project. For us, the fact that they did not most probably reflects the reality that, while most enjoyed the project, the majority of students’ understanding of news was not greatly enriched through it. Certainly, it would have to be concluded that the concept maps do not provide evidence to support the claim that such understandings were advanced to a significant extent for most students.

2.3.2 Pre- and post-project interview items

The data from the 6 comparative questions tend to endorse the overall interpretation extracted from the concept maps: the scale of the learning was generally modest. Each of the 6 items is considered in turn.

Explaining ‘news’

Of the 15 students who gave pre- and post-project responses to the item inviting them to explain ‘news’ to an intelligent alien, 7 could be seen as giving answers consistent with slight learning progressions; the responses of 6 remained similar at both stages; and there were signs of regression in the accounts of two students. There were some indications in the data that students starting from a lower baseline response were slightly more likely to show improvements in their second replies. While the 7 displaying slight progression demonstrated improvements in their answers, none articulated the comparatively high level of enhancement evident in
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five of the concept maps. For example, Table 2.2 shows the comparative responses of three of the 7 students who signalled some learning gains.

Table 2.2 Comparative responses to the explanation of ‘news’ item

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-project</th>
<th>Post-project</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>I would explain it like somebody goes around filming different events that have happened from like the world and stuff like that. And then just say that it does like documentaries and stuff like that and things that happen.</td>
<td>I would say that it’s like when you make people aware of what’s around you and you tell people about what’s been going on in the world and like you basically just telling them what’s going on in the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Well, I would just say that it is… a news and information a lot things that happen in the world and there is specific about the news that you can watch if you want to learn about different things. …. Like if you want to know the weather, you can press interactive and yeah…. if you want to know the headlines, if you want to know about sport, if you want to know about politics, if you want to know about House of Lords, House of Commons and stuff, because politics… there’s news channels.</td>
<td>It’s just the information about most things on different types of media like TV, radio and newspapers. So it’s just information basically about anything you want really, like entertainment, sport, and global political news stuff like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>I’d probably say, it tells you like all the things that’s a serious matter and sometimes it like shows you some action and it’s usually on BBC news. Like I would say probably last time when I was watching it and it just tells you different things about serious matters.</td>
<td>Like it tells you reports about stuff that’s going on around the world and say if there was going to be an earthquake or something, it tells you where it is and if you’re in danger or something. And they have to time it and they tell you the weather and all that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences that would be consistent with moderate degrees of learning may include increased conceptual clarity on the purpose and function of news (e.g. Student 1), awareness of different media and the news (e.g. Student 2) and appreciation of the importance of timing in the production process (e.g. Student 3). However, these examples also illustrate the lack of substantial progression in the understanding of news. Indeed, it could well be argued that the third example exhibits regression in so far as the awareness of the general concept ‘serious matter’ in the pre-project response is not replicated in the post-project which is more restricted to the particular. Moreover in all these examples, the absence of references to the key concepts and issues the BBC sought to develop (e.g. impartiality, objectivity, balance, bias etc.) is indicative of the limited learning in and around these constructs.

Skills needed by editors

The question on the skills needed by an editor elicited responses from a few students which provide evidence of stronger learning on the role of the editor in the production process. Although most students’ answers still reflected only moderate progression in their learning, there were three students for whom a case for more significant learning could be made. Two of these students started from a low baseline, while the
other built on a relatively high baseline. After the project the latter boy was able to broaden his earlier perceptions of the skill demands of an editor by embracing the succinct concept of 'journalism', as well as by adding an insight into the developmental process through which an effective editor may evolve:

Pre-project

Management and kind of priority and… leadership skills, because you have to tell your colleagues why you think their story shouldn’t be in or whatever.

Post-project

I think the most important is leadership and management, because if you can’t get your writers to do what you want then you can’t really do anything with it. But it’s also important to have a knowledge of journalism itself. If you’re just good at leadership and management and you don’t know how to write a story, then you can’t judge other people’s. So probably best to be a writer first and then go off and be an editor, because you can tell which stories are good and which aren’t.

Starting from a less knowledgeable position, at the baseline stage the following boy clearly confused the TV news editor role with that of the news presenter. In his follow-up interview he revealed a more accurate understanding of editing:

Pre-project

Like reading clearly and talking loud and don’t be shy.

Post-project

He’s going to have to be good on the computers to edit stuff and to take stuff out of it and put new stuff in. So he’s going to have to have a good mind.

Similarly, having been initially quite vague about the skills of an editor, this girl had developed a more informed sense of at least some aspects of what an editor does:

Pre-project

Making people understand.

Post-project

Putting things together, like it can’t be all out of order, it has to be in place and everybody has to know it and it has to make sense, like everyone speaking it.

However, while the above three students appear to have made quite significant strides forward, in 7 of the remaining students’ responses it was difficult to detect anything more than minor learning gains. Three students (one from each school) displayed no improvements and the answers of two students were less informed at the follow-up stage than at the baseline interview.
Programmes counting as news

Apart from one student who alluded to occasional news items in ‘Blue Peter’ at the follow-up stage, none of the 15 interviewees displayed any widening of their perceptions of what counts as ‘news’ on the television. There was no progression, for example, towards the recognition that investigative journalism presented in current affairs or documentary programmes may provide ‘news’. Indeed, the project seems to have hardened the view that ‘news’ on television is the sole preserve of news broadcasts. According to the student data, this aspect of extending young people’s understanding of the news did not appear to have featured in the project. With one student suggesting that ‘adverts’ count as news (‘they tell me what’s coming soon’), it may prove useful for any future projects in this area to set the work on news bulletins and broadcasts in the context of a wider examination of how other programmes may contribute to the news agenda.

The perceived audience for news broadcasts

Although a minority of students exhibited signs of widening their views on ‘who TV news is for’, 9 of the 14 students who were asked this question gave roughly the same answer at the follow-up stage as they had done at the baseline stage – predominantly, that the news was for adults. However, five students conveyed some sense of learning that the target audience for news is more complicated than simply saying it’s for adults. Something of the value-added range of this indicative learning across the five students is illustrated by the following two extracts, with the shallower first and the deeper second:

Pre-project

Just normal people, that don’t know what’s going on.

Post-project

Anyone really, just anyone who wants to watch it. Anyone from my age to 80.

Pre-project

Mainly I would say they are mostly for adults, but pretty much all ranges of age, 30, 20, plus.

INTERVIEWER: So not really for you?

STUDENT: No, not so much children. I didn’t like the news for a long time, because it was always bad news.

INTERVIEWER: Does it still?

STUDENT: It does, but I’m alright with that now. But it used to scare me quite a lot.

Post-project

I think morning news is kind of for people… sort of, not really business people working in the heart of the city, but like late starter ones that have jobs where they start at 10 o’clock and you watch it
as you’re having your breakfast, but not kind of business. And then the lunchtime news is older people, pensioners and then the evening news is the rest… there’s 6 o’clock news as well isn’t there, 6 o’clock is a mix of the older and I suppose a few teenagers and adults that have come home from work. And the 10 o’clock news is almost like the business I’d say, well the people that have gone off to work all day just for them to catch up.

The quality of the latter observation was rare and most students appeared to have learnt little about the different target or actual audiences for different news broadcasts.

The importance of watching news

As with the previous items, the repeated question, ‘do you think it is important to watch the news?’ produced little evidence of any change or learning. Of the 15 students who answered it, only two (both from the same school) showed any development in their thinking. One of these responded in the affirmative at the pre-project stage, only to change to a ‘depends on your age’ answer in the post-project interview. The other shifted from a ‘not really’ position to one of assent:

Pre-project

In my opinion, I don’t really think so. … I don’t think it is that important, unless you know something that has happened like really bad, then I will obviously watch it.

Post-project

STUDENT: Now I do.

INTERVIEWER: Now you do, why?

STUDENT: I used to think, my sister would tell me if anything is going to happen and I wouldn’t really care, but now I think it’s good to find out stuff.

INTERVIEWER: And is that since you have done the project or do you think that would have happened anyway?

STUDENT: No, it’s to do with the project because it showed me the relevance of everything that happens.

But with no other student demonstrating movement or change in their outlook on the importance of watching news, the data once again support our overall interpretation that the learning outcomes were modest. Of particular importance in this item was the lack of development in students’ reasons for thinking that watching the news is important. Those, for example, that posited personal or family safety as the main reason for valuing news still relied on that justification after the project. On the basis of the evidence from this item, the project did not appear to have influenced students’ understanding of the social function, purpose and value of news.
Believing the news

The project may have had slightly more effect on whether or not students believed what they saw or heard on the news, though it was clear that the direction of influence was not always towards greater trust – some young people had become more sceptical. The responses of about half (7) of the students suggested some shift towards greater belief in the news. A student explains his reasons for trusting the news more:

More than I did last time, because I know how much work goes into it. If they did what we did then there’s a lot checking going in. But it’s also made me realise it’s easier to make mistakes, because if you write your story as it’s ongoing, you have to be very careful what you say, because you have to be sure there’s only one thing before you write.

Another student swung from not believing the news ‘most of the time’ to trusting ‘most of it’. The critical factor was whether it was realistic and supported by evidence:

Obviously, if there’s evidence or proof of something about what they’re saying, then obviously that’s just normal to believe them. Actually I do believe everything that comes on TV. I don’t believe everything that’s written in the newspapers.

The other half of the student interviewees registered no change (five students) or shifted to a less trusting attitude (three students). One of these, for example, had learnt to doubt the accuracy of reporters’ sources:

INTERVIEWER: My last question is do you believe what you see and hear on the news?

STUDENT: Not in the newspapers, but sometimes on the news, yeah, but it could just be… you don’t know, because if the editor has been getting information from people or from the internet or something, internet could just be totally lies like. So you don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: Has this project made you believe it less, because before you said it was real, now you’re not sure?

STUDENT: No, I’m not too sure.

INTERVIEWER: So the project hasn’t necessarily made you…?

STUDENT: I still believe it’s real, because they wouldn’t lie about some of the things that they talk about. Sometimes they find the wrong information.

Although this item produced more evidence of impacts than others in this subsection, the nature and direction of the effects were varied and divergent. Half of the students, for example, either remained unaffected or shifted in the direction of declaring less trust in the news.

Thus, reviewing the data as a whole from the pre- and post-project interview items, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the emerging evidence from this source corroborates that from the concept maps: namely, that the effects on learning were
limited, both in the quality of impact, as well as the number of students displaying significant learning outcomes. The limited calibre of impact was evident in students’ tendency to see the grounds for disbelieving the news as being related to making mistakes – e.g. they got the wrong information off the internet. In contrast, there was no real learning that bias could be ideologically motivated as a deliberate and conscious choice.

2.3.3 Retrospective open-ended interview

Positioned in the interview schedule before any items on specific areas of learning, the open-ended questions, ‘do you think you’ve learnt anything?’ and [if so] ‘what do you think you’ve learnt or got out of it?’ gave the students an opportunity to describe their perceptions of any learning gains from the project before the researchers’ specific questioning could predicate their thinking. A later section (2.4) will use their responses to this item to portray the accounts of their learning. Here, we look briefly at the data in order to consider what their responses may tell us about the scale and level of student learning.

Across the three schools, the average number of types of learning outcome volunteered by each student was 2.9 – though some variation between schools was evident: two schools posted averages of 3.5 and 3.3 respectively, but the third had an average of only 2.0. While 2.9 would seem a reasonable overall average number of reported outcome types, there were grounds for expecting that more students would have registered four or five outcomes. For example, the School Report project’s aims and recommended curriculum content embraced a wide and diverse range of learning objectives and the interviewers encouraged students to cite as many impacts as they could. Also, the coding and counting system was generous so that allusions of just two or three words to an outcome type were sufficient for them to qualify as a reported impact. This was noticeable, for example, within the outcome type ‘how news programmes are made/put together’, where several references were based on very thin descriptions such as a single intimation like ‘learnt how to cue speakers in’. Moreover, some students’ reports of learning outcomes were quite tangential to the news and media objectives envisaged by the BBC and schools – for example, ‘learnt how to work in a group’ or ‘leadership skills’. Such nominated outcomes were of course coded and counted but their inclusion means that it cannot be assumed that all the reported outcomes, as indicated by the above averages, were central to the sought-after news-related learning.

Hence, it is suggested that the overall level of reported learning outcomes should be seen as fair and acceptable. Clearly, the lower than average results at one of the schools are an important factor and warrant close scrutiny, but this should not detract from examining reasons why the scores from the other two schools were not also higher.

These open-ended questions about learning outcomes were also put to the teachers. In terms of the frequency of responses, the results parallel those of the students. For example, whereas the teachers at the two schools registered between 15 and 19 volunteered comments on learning outcomes, the teacher at the school with the lower level of student nominations posted only 7 such comments. Similarly, while the latter teacher pointed to five types of learning outcome, the teacher at another school described nine.

With regard to the nature and quality of the observations, it is noteworthy that only one outcome type, ‘how news programmes are made and put together’ was identified by teachers at all three schools. In keeping with this, several of the outcomes
volunteered by teachers were restricted to individual schools (e.g. enhanced ICT skills, learning about news concepts such as bias and learning about differences between international, national and local news).

Although teachers pointed to a reasonable array of outcomes for some students, one teacher (at one of the schools where student-reported learning was fair) suggested that the overall learning was moderate and explained that the levels of learning by some pupils were very low because of attendance problems:

A lot of the pupils learnt something and a very small minority, because of reasons not really associated with the project, one or two, explained to their attendance, probably didn’t even understand what we were doing.

She also highlighted that the learning of the more experienced students was also limited:

The ones I have mentioned where I think they have learnt a little are the top end of the class, some of whom you’ve interviewed, because they are always involved in all sorts of interesting projects that go on in school. So they're always ones that are chosen for various things that go on and they are already involved in news room. They're already involved in a variety of things. So they will have learnt something hopefully, but I do not think that they went through a massive learning curve.

Consequently, coupling the partial learning at this school with the lower than average teacher and student reports from another school, the open-ended data from the teachers reinforces the emerging picture of modest overall outcomes. Additionally, the degree of divergence in the perceptions of what was learned across three schools is a strong indication of how local conditions and variable approaches to implementation result in a common set of central resources leading to very different effects.

2.3.4 Retrospective prompted items on learning in specific areas

As could be expected, the researcher-selected questions on specific areas of learning yielded more positive responses than the implicit and open-ended items described above. For 7 of the 12 areas investigated through these prompted items, a majority of students responded in an affirmative mode, often giving an example of what they had learnt in the specified area. In another item, half of the student interviewees offered a positive answer. However, in some of these items between a third and a half denied any learning gains. Furthermore, in the remaining four items most students gave a negative response.

Likewise, no more than half of the 8 prompted items on areas of learning put to teachers generated majorities of positive responses. For four items, none or only one teacher affirmed that learning or change had occurred in the specified area.

Hence, it is considered that these results do not challenge the global conclusion that the learning outcomes achieved by the participating students were reasonable but modest. As a key contextual point, it would seem important to keep this finding in mind when considering the results below.
The identity of the areas associated with majority positive responses, as well as the converse, is revealed and discussed in the next two sections.

2.4 The main learning outcomes

In this section we describe the main learning outcomes and effects that appear to have been generated by the project. The outcome types are depicted in an approximate order of frequency, with the leading ones first. Wherever possible, we draw on the four available sources of data described above, as well as the interviews with teachers.

2.4.1 New insights into the news production process

By a considerable margin, the outcome type most frequently volunteered by students (in response to the unsolicited open-ended question) was learning about ‘how news programmes are made and put together’. Quite unusually for an open-ended item like this, all the students from two of the schools cited some new insight into the production process as an effect of the news project. Two of the 6 students from the third school also nominated it, as did the teachers in all three schools.

Providing strong support for this finding, when asked in the prompted version, ‘... how news broadcasts are made, how they are produced – do you think you have learnt any thing about that?’, all but one of the 18 student interviewees responded positively. All three teachers did likewise.

However, students rarely thought of including their learning about elements of the production process in their concept maps: only three incorporated references to this aspect. Two referred to ‘newsroom’ roles like ‘reporters’, ‘cameramen’ and ‘editors’; another included the ‘putting it together’ process which she linked to ‘choice of news’, ‘basic facts’, ‘keep it simple and clear’ and ‘illustrations’.

To illustrate the range of 82 comments classified under the broad category, ‘new insights into the news production process’, we coded the data into different sub-types. The main sub-types and their frequencies are shown in Table 2.3.

In the interviews with students and teachers, general descriptions of acquiring an insight into the production process as a whole constituted the most numerous kind of sub-type comment within this category. There was a disproportionately high number of such comments from one school. One student from this school summed up what he learnt as follows:

I think I have learnt quite a bit about how they’re made, because that is the first thing that we have to learn when we watched the video of Huw Edwards. It showed how to gather the information, how to put it together, order it and how to tidy up scripts and stuff.

As mentioned in the previous section, some students offered much thinner references to this sub-category of the greater awareness of the production process outcome: ‘how to put together a news thing’. The teachers at all three schools also described this kind of learning outcome, for example, ‘they’ve certainly learnt a lot more about the collection of news and how news itself is found and put together.’

The second most frequent sub-category within the broad production process type of learning outcome centred on increased awareness of the amount of work, time and planning that goes into the making of news broadcasts, along with realisations of how difficult and challenging the associated skill demands could be. Once again,
students from one of the schools were more likely to make such observations than their peers from the other two schools. Examples are offered from students from all three schools:

I’ve learnt how much hard work they do to all the stuff, because normally if you’re watching telly you just think, ‘oh right, they’ve found news and they’ve reported it,’ but there is a lot of hard work that goes in. And it’s normally quite stressful. And everything has to be planned. You can’t just go off and do something without everyone else in the group knowing.

It’s made me much more aware of the news, when I hear it on the radio, because you always assume that it takes 10 minutes to prepare or something. And if it’s a five minute broadcast, but it really does take a long time, and when you hear these long news programmes, you’re just like ‘argh!’

I learnt that it wasn’t that easy and they have to do many steps to broadcast the news.

How hard it is to like find out information and record it and things like that, because you’ve got to have like loads of information. You’ve got to know when it’s right, you’ve got to edit it, you’ve got to… it’s quite hard.

Teachers also commented on how students had learnt to appreciate the amount of work that is required:

They knew or particularly the 8 who we took out, knew more about the behind the scenes, before they just thought it was just this news reader…

And I think they have been very surprised by the amount of work that has to go into say a five minute bulletin, as well as sort of 30 minute news programmes as well.

A third sub-category of responses from students and teachers focused on matters relating to **scripting and the writing-into-speaking process** – as some pupils explained, the latter entailed learning to write in such a way that facilitated trouble-free reading and natural speech. With all these comments being made by students from two schools, the absence of any from the third may indicate that the students at the third school did not experience a programme that focused on the writing and scripting processes associated with news production (this is discussed in more detail in the next section).

Use appropriate vocabulary for your audience.

And I didn’t know that before then and then writing the scripts to the timescale, again, which I mentioned earlier is very hard and I didn’t know about how strict it actually had to be.

Yeah I learnt about the steps and how to make the news – writing the story like you have to do it two or three times. Like if you just do it once then you should at least look up again, read it again and
check it, because then it’s easy to make a mistake when you’re reading…

Yeah I learnt that sometimes they have to take a couple of takes to make sure that you say you like… so one’s not biased, so you don’t sound emotional and stuff, because that’s the way the news thinks. That a certain thing is wrong or whatever something like that.

And I had to make sure, make it easy for her, so that she could understand and so it was easier for her to read as well. So I had to re-write it all again so I can make it really neat and put all the commas in the right place. And make it easier for her, the way she would like it. So I wrote it the way that she would want to read it. So you have to like communicate and find out the way she would like to read it. So I wrote it the way that she would like it.

A fourth set of sub-type comments (classified within the broad category) referred to the use of equipment in the production process. The main equipment cited included computers, cameras, microphones and recording equipment. The following illustrate this sub-type of students’ nominated learning within the broad production process category:

Learnt how to use new software on the computers and make my own radio broadcast.

I’ve learnt like how to actually use a microphone properly, like the proper microphones. And learnt how to make a script on the computer

How to use a video camera properly.

I’ve learnt how to control what I’m doing, like when we used to get a mini-camera we just used to zoom in and out, but we learnt how to focus on one thing and know how long you should leave it and stuff like that.

A fifth sub-type centred on the importance of pace and timing. Typical examples were:

…. three words is like three seconds. And working out how much you had to put for the amount of time that you had. And what brings in the reader or listener as soon as the first few words…

Oh yeah, because when we were reading it out some people were going so fast that you couldn’t actually understand what they were saying. So we learnt that you had to read it and check it and plan it so that you have like three seconds per word and stuff. We had a second thing… a sheet with one second, two seconds and you had to write the word that you say in that time, so you got the perfect pace and the perfect timing so it would sound absolutely perfect and how you’d like it.

There’s lots of people writing up the stories, the story kind of gets checked and then it all goes into a time sheet and if your story is a little bit over you either have to cut it or hopefully somebody else’s
has got a space, you can’t... you have a time range. And the editors and producers they give you that timing. And it's not ok if I go one second over, because one second can make the whole thing can cause somebody else’s story - then they wouldn’t get all their story in. So you have to be very precise with the time and if you’re not, you have to work over and over it, until it is the right time.

In addition to the above five sub-types, there were a small number (8) of other comments (see Table 2.3) within the broad category of new insights into the production process. These included references to learning about speech modulation in reading the news and to the process of editing material. One student also described her realisation that some parts of news broadcasts were recordings which were interwoven with live presentations:

You know on the news where they’ll say like, ‘over to this...’ and then they’ll start speaking, it's a bit weird, but now I sort of get it, because they will have been speaking and then they’ll have had some sort of recorder and ages ago they will have recorded that.

Table 2.3 Sub-types of learning outcomes within the broad ‘new insights into the news production process’ category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General accounts of learning about the production process as a whole</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased awareness of the amount of work and skill demands required in process</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning associated with scripting and speaking from scripts</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to use equipment in the production process</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about the importance of pace and timing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about other aspects of the production process (e.g. speech modulation; editing; that some speech is live, some is recorded)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, we have shown that insights into how news programmes are made was the main broad type of learning outcome and five themes or sub-types can be identified within the students’ and teachers’ accounts:

- the whole process of putting the news together
- the amount of challenging work and skill demands involved in this process
- scripting and the writing-into-speaking process
- the use of equipment in the production process
- the importance of pace, timing and cueing

2.4.2 Improvements in communication skills

The second most frequent type of outcome concerned enhancements to students’ communication skills, including reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. In response to the open-ended ‘what have you learned?’ every student interviewee at
one school volunteered at least one of the four constituent communication skills as a key outcome of the School Report project. Four from another school did so, but only one from the third did. Described by 9 students, the development of writing skills was clearly the most frequently cited enhanced communication skill. Four students mentioned improvements in speaking; two mentioned reading; and none nominated listening. Communication skills were also nominated by teachers at two schools.

Data from the corresponding prompted question confirmed these results. With only one exception, student interviewees were of the opinion that the project had contributed to advances in their communication skills.

The students testified to a wide range of learning gains in their writing skills. The following illustrate the nature and range of these perceived developments;

- **information gathering**
  
  And writing, yeah, because we had to gather information
  
  how to research
  
  writing skills like finding out about things, like interviewing people about what happened and that

- **vocabulary**
  
  writing because we have got to write long words, not like little baby words, because on the news you have really big words and different… and that’s helped us on my writing
  
  definitely in English, using more interesting words and stuff like that

- **being clear, concise and correct (several references)**
  
  I learnt many important tips like the three c’s and answering all the questions like the w’s …. clear, concise and correct … who, where, what, when, how and why
  
  Yeah and how to be precise.

- **managing and referencing sources**
  
  And when you get information from sites you can’t just write it down without permission or pictures or whatever

- **the importance of grammar and the revising process**
  
  but then I learned you had to write it properly and check your grammar and you had to practise it many times before you actually do the thing, because you have to be ready for it
  
  But as it went on you learnt that a story could change and be updated, so you would need to re-plan things and you find different sentences which you think would be best tied in and then as you go through the story gets bigger and better. And it starts to really roll and then you think… so your planning will get better. So when it
Lifeblood of democracy? Learning about broadcast news

gets to the final article it will be a lot better, because it will be a lot bigger and you have different words and sentences and phrases in like different paragraphs as well

Because we wrote a broadcast and at first I thought it sounded really good and I checked it and I thought, it's still pretty good, but then when we read it out loud, it didn't sound very good. So I learnt that you have got to check it and then check again by actually reading it out so everyone can hear you. Because then you really find out what's wrong and where your commas are and everything and it's got to be set out right

Yeah like I would say like the timing and stuff in my speaking when I read, and I have got more punctuation in my writing, because we had to get it 100% perfect. So we had to use all the punctuation and stuff, so I can use my commas and that a lot better

• structure

I learnt to structure… to use paragraphs … if it was a normal story like a normal basic story then I can use paragraphs, but we learnt why, the reason, we learnt why to use paragraphs. And the different paragraphs in stories, to take a break

• writing for speaking

I've learnt how to write a news story. And I've learnt how to when you're writing it you don't have to write it like someone else's reading it, you have to write it like you're speaking it out. That's what I've learnt

it would help me if I'm writing an interview or talking to… or making a speech or something like that

because I wrote the story, but I didn't read it, my partner read it. And I had to make sure, make it easy for her, so that she could understand and so it was easier for her to read as well. So I had to re-write it all again so I can make it really neat and put all the commas in the right place. And make it easier for her, the way she would like it. So I wrote it the way that she would want to read it. So you have to like communicate and find out the way she would like to read it

• writing to limits

And how to write to a time scale, because we had sheets when the certain amount of words were

We had a second thing… a sheet with one second, two seconds and you had to write the word that you say in that time, so you got the perfect pace and the perfect timing so it would sound absolutely perfect and how you'd like it.
• audience differentiation

Well you can’t use long and big words to a primary school audience really. So it depends who you are aiming your audience at, to the words you’re going to use.

Although much less numerous, accounts of improvements in speaking skills were collected from students at all the schools. Perceived areas of learning included better timing (often slowing down) in delivery, voice modulation, greater clarity, speaking ‘formally’, avoiding slang and local accents, the importance of practising and increased confidence in speaking in front of people. Because the few references to gains in reading skills usually focused on the task of speaking from prepared news scripts, they covered very similar ground to that for speaking skills.

2.4.3 Enrichments of journalistic skills

Allied to the development of writing skills, growth in the skills associated with journalism was the third most frequently recorded outcome type. Almost half (8) of the student interviewees volunteered this outcome – though none from one school nominated it. Teachers at two schools identified it as an effect on students. All but one student interviewee responded positively to the prompted item asking about the learning of journalistic skills. Additionally, the post-project concept maps of three students – all from one school – included themes related to journalism (e.g. the five w’s, journalists’ research, journalists and gossip).

Students’ interview comments on their learning of journalistic skills occasionally overlapped with what they had said about gains in writing skills (e.g. three c’s and five w’s, checking and revising) but some were more directly related to the work of journalists. A few students thought that through the project they had acquired a better insight into the tasks performed by journalists:

I never really knew what a journalist did before, but now I do, because I know how they feel when they go in front of the camera and then it gets broadcasted.

Some alluded to the time pressures that journalists often work under:

[you have to be] very quick and you can’t dawdle

You need to kind of always keep motivated and you have to know that the deadline is… you cannot go past that. If it’s two o’clock, which is what I gave mine, if you have only got half of it done you can only broadcast half of it. There’s not any negotiation with that, you have to do it for that time. It does make a difference on how you write the stories, because when there’s only an hour left you are really kind of thinking we have got a lot to do in this time.

Like when we’re running around like what journalists do and we had to like time everything up and that’s what we had to do, time it all up.

Others referred to the importance of having evidence and the journalistic techniques of gathering information from different sources, mainly the internet and interviews:

because you have got to gather information, knowing where to collect evidence,
I learnt that some things you don’t have to mention… oh yeah, you know the source yeah, you have to make sure it’s reliable

I’ve learned how to follow up with a question, like if you ask something, like hang on, what does this mean to you? And I’ve learnt also that you can’t always have information that you want. You can’t just like pretend somebody likes something, ‘oh like the polls [unclear] says so’ you have to back it up.

Voice projection and modulation figured again in their accounts:

Make your voice so it’s not like one boring tone all the time

So they taught us how like to speak and engage the reader and how to write so that it all sounded a lot better than ordinary, by using expressive words or something.

One student had realised the potential of a good ‘hook’:

you have to be catchy to get the readers or listener’s attention

Backing up one teacher’s observation that her students had been very interested in bias, one student included it in her descriptions of her learning outcomes:

We need to present evidence and you need to not be biased and to make your story, you need to make it to the point and stuff.

A teacher summed up their learning about the role of a journalist:

They have, they’ve gathered information, they’ve processed it, they’ve prioritised it and they wrote a script, they gave it to the sub-editor to look at. Sub-editor looked at it, signed it off, if they were happy, or gave it back, if they weren’t. So I think that sort of element did give them a slight flavour of what people have to do.

2.4.4 Other moderate learning outcomes

Thus far, we have identified three strong learning outcomes engendered by the School Report project: the news production process, communication skills and journalistic skills. All three, for example, attracted more than 8 student nominations in response to the open-ended item. They also featured comparatively highly in other data sources, particularly the prompted questions.

Although less strong, five other learning outcome types were evident to a significant degree in the data. These moderate or partially-achieved outcomes are deemed significant either because the status of the evidence is relatively high, they impacted upon a sizeable number of students or because the quality of the learning effect was substantial, even if limited to a small minority of students. They are outlined below.

Developing ICT skills

The only other outcome type to attract more than two or three unsolicited nominations concerned ICT knowledge and skills. Six student interviewees (with at least one from each school) volunteered that their ICT skills had been extended through involvement on the project. According to these students, they were better at finding information on the internet. Endorsed by one of the teachers, they also
described how they had learnt to use editing software like ‘Movie maker’ and ‘Audacity’. As two students put it:

Windows Media Maker, I hadn’t done the real thing on it yet, but that was like the first time of using it properly and I learned a lot, like the titles and how to cut some bits and how to put them in another place and found it really helpful.

You listen to it and say you’ve said something wrong and you say, ‘no I’ve got to take it out,’ you’d like stop it and then go to the end of it and cut that out and then put something else in.

Clearly, as these students illustrate, attendant upon the learning of the technical skills of manipulating the software is the experience of editing sound and visual recordings for news bulletins. The interface between these two aspects will be considered further in Section 3.

Learning about audience expectations

Although only one student volunteered anything on this theme, two-thirds of the student interviewees responded positively to a question on learning about how audience expectations may affect the making of news programmes. The remaining third, predominantly from one school, felt that no such learning had occurred. There were very few signs of this theme emerging in students’ post-project concept maps.

A number of students talked about learning how to ensure that the news had the appropriate level and depth of details for a certain audience:

I just learned that the audience they only want the main things. They don’t want it dragged on like, if there’s a headline they just want to know exactly what happened, they don’t want … tiny little details.

Yeah we learnt what would be suitable for them and that. Like different things that might be more important than others, and if it wasn’t that important we would edit it and that. And just put things on that are really important.

One student saw balance as an audience expectation:

Yeah they might want good quality news not like rubbish news. And they want both sides, like one audience might think ‘why are they saying that’ and the other one might think, ‘yeah they did good’, but they have to get both sides. It has to be equal.

Others pointed to the importance of selecting a language register and content suitable to the target audience:

It depends what audience you have, but if you know your audience then you can do the right story, you’ve got to put the right story in the right timing and you need good news and the bad news, if you know them, it will be a good story.

Yeah I think, for a different audience if you’re broadcasting to children… if you said they expect serious stories, but also a lot of, I don’t know, maybe a celebrity piece and a sport or something like
that. Whereas if you’re on Radio [X], they’ll still want the sport and they’re not so… if it wasn’t there, they’d still listen to it and it would still be worth listening to.

Other themes running through the students’ accounts included the need to avoid being offensive and to safeguard children’s identities:

There was one bit where we weren’t allowed to say I think it was… I don’t know we were allowed to say… children’s last name, we weren’t allowed to say that, because you… I think it’s for the child safety if it went out publicly then you weren’t allowed to say their names.

You have to be very careful, because if you say something that can be seen offensive to anybody really then it can get you into quite bad trouble.

One teacher confirmed the students’ testimonies of their learning in the following way:

I think they have demonstrated that when you give them a particular target audience doing that, they were able to, after discussion and negotiation, were able to come up with different running orders and with different content actually, not just running orders, but different content.

Learning about social and political acceptability

Although no-one volunteered any learning about matters relating to social, political and ethical acceptability, when asked about this subject, 10 of the 18 students indicated that they had learnt something about it. These students were spread fairly evenly across the three schools. The majority of comments, however, went little further than noting that it was important not to offend listeners and viewers. Neither the interviews nor the concept maps displayed any signs of the students addressing the more complex social, political or cultural issues involved.

Covering some of the same ground as the previous outcome type, much of the reported learning was cast in terms of becoming more aware of the need to avoid ‘upsetting’ individuals (e.g. a boy reported as weighing 14 stone) and groups of people (‘sick people in a poor country’). This was often relayed as not being ‘rude or offensive’ and three students (all from one school) flagged up the issue of bias:

Like you couldn’t say anything racist or anything like that. And stuff like, you can’t say slight swear words.

Yeah I’ve learnt about not to be biased. Not to take no one’s side, to mention any racial comments or any rude comments about someone that might be nasty.

Not to be biased like if you were reporting on the sports not to say that this team is better than that team you have to not put your opinion into it and we only learnt that in the CLC.

Yeah, that you have to make sure you’re careful about what you say, like what I meant before, like don’t take sides, you should show both
sides of the story and don’t make it out as one person’s like in the wrong. Like, don’t point it out too much. … Like don’t assume, don’t accuse people, like if there’s a certain thing that has happened and it’s someone’s fault, you shouldn’t accuse them, you should hear

Changes in the viewing habits of TV news

Although only two students volunteered that their viewing of TV news had changed as a result of the School Report project, 14 student interviewees (with similar numbers from the three schools) responded positively to a direct question on this.

Eleven of these 14 students stated that they watched TV news more (one of the 11 specifically said that she watches BBC news more). The remaining three explained that they had changed the way they watched the news without necessarily increasing their viewing time. The 11 who had increased their viewing time of TV news were distributed fairly evenly across the schools. Although some students added that they only watch ‘a little bit’ more, they all attributed their increased viewing of news to the project. Some students qualified their response by describing what type of news they were now more likely to view:

Sometimes I watch it a bit more if there is like more interesting stuff on, like if there is anything to do with any local things. I’ll watch the local news more. And what I do like in international [news], because I do find that a bit boring, is can the local stuff can be anything around here, so it just warns you if there’s anything

This self or family preservation motive for watching the news was a common refrain in many young people’s accounts of the reasons for news viewing.

Five students indicated that they were now watching the news differently in that they were paying more attention to the issues and stories, as well as feeling more sympathy for some of the people involved and reflecting upon it:

I pay attention to more of the important things than what I used to, because I used to just sit there and think, ‘oh yeah that’s nice, get over it,’ but now I pay more attention to it and realise it that the people are in danger and how they must feel and things like that.

I just I think that I talk about it more now. And like if there is a story, like before I would have just thought ‘oh right then’. But now I’d like talk to my dad and have a discussion about it.

Like to know what’s happening around the world and your area. You just want to know and since I have been doing that, it makes you want to know.

Reflecting once again how learning about news broadcasts are made constituted one of the main outcomes gained, four students described how they watched more news because they were more aware of the process behind it:

Like when I watch the news I just watch it and I just listen to the story but now I’ve actually done this process I want to be there and see how it’s all made and everything.
Before it was just like, you don’t really watch it, you just look at it. But now I really take an interest in it. For like … they use a different sentence like they were saying something in a different order and I was just like, ‘well why have they done that? Why don’t they just keep it in this order?’

Encouraging positive attitudes to school and learning

Although none of the students or teachers volunteered this effect, half of the 18 student interviewees responded to the question, ‘do you think the project has made any difference to how you feel about school in general – has it made you more positive about the school or has it made you less keen on school?’ by indicating that the School Report project had (to varying degrees) helped bolster positive and constructive attitudes to their learning at school. It is worth bearing in mind, though, that the other half demurred and relayed no such impact. Nevertheless, the responses of the 9 who replied in the affirmative suggest that some significant, albeit partial, effects had occurred. Their observations are noteworthy as they signal the potential of news projects to help tackle the problem of student disaffection.

Four of the 9 felt that the project had increased their motivation towards school in general:

- It has made me more keen about school, because after doing the project I gathered up skills. So I can use it in school rather than just waste it sitting around doing nothing, sitting at home, when you can use your skills at school and you get chances at school a lot when you’re writing reports and stuff. It’s good.

  Made me more positive.

- Yeah I’m more positive about the school and especially we were on the lunchtime on BBC news and when everybody, all the teachers came in to watch on the TV, that was really, kind of made you feel that you were appreciated.

- Yeah I suppose [it has made me feel more positive about school], because I always thought that school was a bit boring and I dreaded going to it, but that was really fun. And sometimes we do fun things in lessons.

Another four did not say that the project had improved their attitudes to school as a whole, but pointed to feeling more equipped for and confident in English or media lessons:

- Not really in general, but some lessons are better because I know more about it. … Like English and if we do news in media again it will be really good, because I know more.

- Positive … especially about English as well, because I’m happier coming to English now, because we have done more stuff for it.

- It makes you want to learn more about English and that and just do more things.
It’s made me enjoy media and that more, because I wasn’t a big person for media. But now I look forward to media lessons and that. I stopped media because I thought it was boring, back in Year 7, but I’m doing it again now, because I enjoy it.

One student described how the project had increased his self-confidence, with the inference that this would help him in the school arena, as well as in a wider range of social contexts:

More like… I’ve got more courage, I walk around and I know more people. … Like if anything comes up, I can just… who’s been involved… because stuff like, stuff, they say ‘have you been involved with anything?’ And I could say ‘yeah I have been involved with the BBC.’

Interestingly, the teachers were more tentative and more sceptical about a single project bringing about long-term attitudinal change:

Generally there is no change in their attitude, it’s always been good and that’s the danger with any project if you choose top set for example you’re always going to get kids that are, generally speaking, have a positive attitude.

It’s special isn’t it and therefore it is exciting. But to say is it on a long term, you can’t… [measure it].

Finally, one teacher highlighted how the potential for reducing disaffection and increasing motivation though such projects can be scuttled, and possibly reversed, by organisational problems which have a negative effect on students’ self-esteem:

During the course of the project I think they felt very privileged and enthusiastic to be part of it. I think that they felt a little bit on the last day, a little bit let down by the whole experience. I think it was a bit of an anti-climax for them. And I think that was the last thing that I wanted, because I wanted it to enrich their school experience, which at the time of it, leading up to March 22nd certainly did, and you know they were excited about being part of it and they looked forward to the days at [X], but I think the last day, maybe took the edge off it a little bit for them.

Having portrayed the nature of the learning outcomes gained by students, we move on to consider briefly some of the educational objectives and effects that were not achieved to a significant extent.

### 2.5 Rarely and barely achieved learning outcomes

To close this section, we take a brief look at the learning outcomes that achieved only marginal status. As before, these have been identified by considering the strength of the evidence, the number of students citing each outcome and the quality of effects reported.

Weak outcomes generated by the project included:

- **Understanding what ‘news’ is** – as described in section 2.3.2, comparisons between the pre- and post-project interview items on explaining ‘news’ showed that around half of the students indicated no progress and the remaining half displayed
only slight progress; only five students exhibited significant learning in their concept maps (see 2.3.1); only one student volunteered anything vaguely related to this outcome (i.e. he learnt about the different types of newspapers).

- **News concepts such as impartiality, balance and fairness** – echoing the findings on understanding ‘news’, these concepts seldom surfaced in the post-project concept maps; only two students’ unsolicited responses offered allusions to such concepts, one mentioning ‘reliability’ of sources and the other ‘balance’ (‘You have to listen to both sides of the story, you can’t just talk to someone and then just take their views. If they have an argument you have to take both sides and you have to be open minded towards people’s views and stuff.’); although some students cited ‘bias’ in their answers to prompted questions and their teachers endorsed learning about bias, the majority of students did not refer to this conceptual learning (none of the students from one school did so) and those that did rarely began to unpack such principles as ‘impartiality’, ‘objectivity’ or ‘fairness’.

- **Broadening definitions of ‘news’** - apart from one student who alluded in the follow-up interview to occasional news items in a children’s programme, none of the 15 interviewees displayed any expansion of their perceptions of what counts as ‘news’ on the television; no students volunteered anything related to this outcome; and the general message from the concept mapping exercise of limited growth in the understanding of ‘news’ is indicative of the absence of any widening in the perceptions of what counts as news; as argued in 2.3.2, the project seems to have consolidated the view that ‘news’ on television is the preserve of news broadcasts.

- **The target audience for news** – a similar picture emerges for the widening of perceptions regarding the audiences for news; 9 of the 14 students asked this comparative pre- and post-project question gave virtually the same answer in the follow-up interviews as they had done at the baseline stage – predominantly, that the news was for adults; the outcome was not volunteered by any student or teacher; and only three concept maps signalled any broadening of perspective on who the news is for.

- **The importance of watching news** – although findings presented in section 2.4.4 revealed that students reported watching the news more, there is little evidence to suggest that students had learnt that it is important to watch the news or that the reasons for seeing the news as important had been enriched; only two students showed any development in their thinking from the baseline to the follow-up interviews; only one student volunteered that she now saw it as important to watch the news; and the concept maps show no sign of progression in that direction.

- **Trust and belief in the news** – as described in 2.3.2, the evidence on whether the project had influenced students’ trust or belief in the news was ambivalent, both in terms of the numbers involved (i.e. about half were more likely to believe TV news, the other half were the same or less trusting) and in terms of the direction and quality of reported impacts, namely, students’ responses often remained fairly unsophisticated (TV news was believed more because it was in pictures) or revealed an unresolved degree of confusion e.g. ‘you don’t know, because if the editor has been getting information from people or from the internet or something, internet could just be totally lies like. So you don’t know…. I’m not too sure. … I still believe it’s real, because they wouldn’t lie about some of the things that they talk about. Sometimes they find the wrong information’. The concept maps seldom suggested greater trust in the news and none of the students volunteered that the project had impacted upon their level of belief or doubt in the news.
• **The role and skills of the editor** – earlier in the section (2.3.2) we reported that the pre- and post-interview item showed that, while three students demonstrated significant progress in their understanding of editorial roles and skills, the majority of students displayed only slight improvements or none at all; only two students (both from the same school and one was also one of the three just mentioned) volunteered learning about the editorial role as an outcome and the quality of the reported learning was quite meagre (e.g. I learnt quite a bit about editing, in the radio broadcast); only two included editorial aspects in their post-project concept maps.

• **Changes in listening to radio news** – only five of the student interviewees suggested that their radio news listening habits had changed (three of these came from the school where radio production had a high profile in their project experience); four of these were limited to saying that they listen more, with only one going on to say how it had changed the quality of his listening: ‘it's actually made me feel more appreciative of it and how much work has gone in, especially all the channels and all the hours that must have taken’; there were no voluntary nominations of this outcome.

• **Changes in the viewing of other TV programmes** – only three of the 18 student interviewees reported any changes in their viewing of TV programmes other than news broadcasts; and often the changes they described were minor and somewhat indeterminate: ‘some of them, because it's just the way they are acting and stuff, and you're thinking well they're in front of the camera, it must [be the same as when we did it]’ or ‘No not really. Sometimes I can… no not really. I can, sometimes it will… I can bring new subjects in if I'm watching other programmes and I'll say that’s got something to do with the news and I'll talk about it in my own way’; there were no unsolicited nominations of this outcome.

• **Political awareness and informed citizenship** – to explore a research question posed in the proposal for the study students and teachers were asked, ‘do you think that doing this project has made you more aware of politics and made it more likely that if you were over 18 you would vote in an election?’; most students maintained that it had not or that they were unsure, though one-third (6) of the students felt that it had raised their political awareness and some thought it would encourage them to vote when they are 18; one of the teachers agreed with them, but the others were not convinced that the project was (or should have been) designed to achieve this: ‘I think the link is very tenuous for children and don't think it’s necessarily helpful’; in truth, some of the students’ responses did appear fragile and probably short-lived: ‘Probably, yeah’ and ‘because like you don’t really think much of it and that, but once you've done something to do with it and you think it is good and stuff, you want to be in with it’; no unsolicited references to this learning outcome were offered.

• **BBC values** – all student interviewees were asked the question, ‘do you think you have learnt anything about what the BBC believes in, what the BBC thinks is important, what its values are?’ – to which only two replied in the affirmative; one had clearly internalised the views of a BBC journalist with whom he had worked: ‘Well we had… I think it was [name of BBC journalist] but she kept… she told us on one of the preparation days that some of the stories that she had on the BBC and she was saying how she liked working with them, because all they do is honest. And it has kind of made me think more about, because when you're doing stories you really have to check over and over again, because if you get anything wrong in a story, it can be really bad. So it has made me believe more of the BBC stories I suppose you could say, because they have got that reputation.’; the other had
learnt that the BBC was not biased; the remaining students were uncertain or did not feel they had learnt about the BBC’s values, apart from a few who thought that the news organisation who had initiated the project thought it was important that young people should get involved in news making; none of the students volunteered this learning outcome.

- **Public service broadcasting** – this potential outcome did not appear on the radar of any of the four data sources.

### 2.6 Summary

To sum up, this section has presented three main findings.

1. Overall, the learning outcomes achieved by the participating students were reasonable but modest. In some areas, significant learning was achieved, but in others, the learning was partial and marginal.

2. There were 8 main learning outcomes. The first three were particularly strong and prevalent:

   i) New insights into the news production process
   ii) Improvements in communication skills
   iii) Enrichments of journalistic skills
   iv) Developing ICT skills
   v) Learning about audience expectations
   vi) Learning about social and political acceptability
   vii) Changes in the viewing habits of TV news
   viii) Encouraging positive attitudes to school and learning

3. There were 12 outcomes and objectives that were barely and rarely learnt:

   ix) Understanding what ‘news’ is
   x) News concepts such as impartiality, balance and fairness
   xi) Broadening definitions of ‘news’
   xii) The target audience for news
   xiii) The importance of watching news
   xiv) Trust and belief in the news
   xv) The role and skills of the editor
   xvi) Changes in listening to radio news
   xvii) Changes in the viewing of other TV programmes
xviii) Political awareness and informed citizenship

xix) BBC values

xx) Public service broadcasting

References


Section 3

Factors Contributing to Learning

3.1 Introduction

In this section we identify and comment on the factors in our three case studies that appear to have supported the learning outcomes that the students achieved. We also explore the factors that may account for the outcomes that they do not seem to have achieved in relation to the central theme of our research brief: ‘the ways in which young people can best be helped towards a better understanding of news and its role in national and global events’.

As we have shown in Section 2, learning outcomes were strong and prevalent in three areas: the news production process, communication skills and journalistic skills. However, the learning outcomes were more moderate for five further areas, and partial and marginal for twelve more, most of which relate to more critical and evaluative aspects of learning about TV news. As these aspects are prominent in the curricular requirements for Key Stage 3, as well as being key elements of media literacy, a lack of learning outcomes in these areas is surprising.

In the first part of this section (3.2) we describe the elements of the project that the students themselves referred to when telling us how they had achieved the learning that they did. In the second part (3.3) we describe other factors which we think contributed to learning, but which we have identified from students’ accounts of what they did, from other more general comments, and from researchers’ observations on News Day.

In the third part (3.4) we describe aspects of the project where we think problems arose that may have limited learning outcomes and therefore contributed to the relatively modest level of learning that we have found.

3.2 Students identifying factors contributing to learning

In their post-project interviews, after students had responded to the open-ended question ‘do you think that you’ve learned anything through doing this project?’ they were all asked ‘was there a part of the project that helped you to learn that?’ in relation to each of the learning outcomes they had cited. They were also asked this when they made positive responses to any of the prompted questions, relating to 12 pre-selected areas (see 2.2.4). At no time were students reminded about specific parts of the project or encouraged to think about what they might have learned from specific activities or inputs, so this line of questioning was also relatively open-ended. The factors they cited went in many cases well beyond the formal structures and materials the project provided, so we have analysed the data using a coding frame based on the values that the students were attributing to the factors they described.

3.2.1 New Ground Rules

Although students cited a wide range of activities that they thought contributed to their learning, a common feature of more than 35 of these comments was the distinctive and often exciting experience of doing something that was subject to imperatives different from those normally found in the classroom. As the following three quotations indicate, this could include making an actual recording (audio or audio-visual), but it also included working with unfamiliar software, assuming new responsibilities, or even simply writing in a different way for a new kind of purpose.
I was excited to speak on the radio and that made us want to do it more. So I like speaking on the radio. (Student explaining how he learned to speak more confidently.)

I had to call like editorial meetings and stuff like that and at the end of the day I had to choose which stories went in. So to keep control of it all was the leadership skills, how I learnt it. And originally I found it really hard, because it was hard to keep everything together and keep an eye on everything, but it got better as it went on. (Student who said he had learned leadership skills.)

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INTERVIEWER: So when you say writing a news story, which bits of the project helped you to learn that?

STUDENT: When I was typing it out the actual news story. (Student who said she had learned how to write a news story.)

We have grouped these comments into one category called ‘New Ground Rules’ in order to express the kind of value students seemed to be ascribing to these activities. The common factor here is students’ sense that they were coming up against new and non-negotiable demands: these might be set by the professional practices of news media, but equally often they were set by the knowledge that they were making a unique contribution to the group effort, and by the public nature of the final product, in contrast to work done primarily for teacher assessment. A student who, like many, cited ‘how it’s all put together’ as one of the things he had learned, referred to this collective responsibility and his own key role:

The first time we had to record it and we had to think of something, how to make it look interesting. And G---- was the reader and then we interviewed Miss ----- and I was recording it.

Another student who said he had learned about how to use the right vocabulary for the intended audience explained how this emerged through the experience of trying out his draft on others and having to redraft in the light of their response:

Yeah well at first I didn’t know who the audience was for, so I was using really big words, but then they told us it was going to be an audience for our age, maybe younger. So I then thought... I read it and not many people understood it. So I learnt that I’ve got to tone down the big words and maybe make it more understandable for other people.

The repeated use of terms like ‘had to’ and ‘got to’ in these comments suggests that the inflexibility of the project’s rules and deadline was new to students, so that it seems to have been this sudden sense of real responsibility that encouraged students to internalise and take ownership of new skills and understanding. This correlates with one of the BBC project leaders’ expectations:

...what teachers had told us as one of the really good things that kids take away from this, is what it feels like to work towards a real deadline, really try your best, everybody all working to a single deadline altogether and that not changing, because there is lots, of,
in schools in the end homework and stuff like that, there is lots of
deadline changes…

The fact that 19 of the ‘New Ground Rules’ comments related to the learning
outcomes nominated by students in response to the open-ended question in their
post-project interviews underlines the importance of this factor. However, we have to
point out that 13 of these comments all came from one school. Some of the reasons
for this may modify the importance of ‘New Ground Rules’ as a factor, but others may
reinforce it.

Firstly, three of the six case study students in this school were highly thoughtful and
reflective people who volunteered several learning outcomes each and had a lot to
say about why they thought they had learned them. Secondly, five of the six students
had actually had more significant roles to play on News Day than any of the students
in the other two schools. Two had leading editorial roles in the school’s radio
production; the other three were all selected – at the last minute – to record audio
and video material to create a documentary about the Day for the school. These last
three were in fact the less confident and articulate of the six, but nevertheless the
sudden responsibility of their allocated tasks led to their making extensive comments
in their interviews about how they had learned from them, for example in the
following account of how this student gained new insights into the production process
when he learned the pitfalls of using a microphone by trial and error:

Yeah, because it’s like… when they say ‘oh yeah, this is how you do
it,’ it’s actually a lot harder when you actually come to do it, because
like when they were just saying we got to use the camera and film it
and use the microphone, it’s actually lots harder, because you have
to put the microphone in the right place. If you just move it then it
will just make a noise in the middle of the film.

These two students were the only ones across all three schools who had this kind of
singular and extended responsibility for an aspect of audio-visual production. It is
particularly unusual for students to be allowed to shoot or record unscripted
documentary material on their own. Most students either did small amounts of sound
recording, or no actual recording at all. However, we do not wish to imply that the
‘New Ground Rules’ factor can only relate to using the more prestigious items of
equipment. The essential feature of ‘New Ground Rules’ – the sense of confrontation
with new imperatives – was used by students in a range of other comments
responding to the prompted questions as well as the open-ended ones.

INTERVIEWER: In what way are you more confident?

STUDENT: Being in front of a camera.

INTERVIEWER: You hadn’t done that before?

STUDENT: No. I had, but not face to face, the camera would be
moving yeah, I’m here and that’s there and then some of them are
watching.

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STUDENT: And writing, yeah, because we had to gather
information.
INTERVIEWER: Summarise it?

STUDENT: Make sure it’s always neat enough for other people to read. (Explanation of why writing skills had improved.)

In summary then: although the direct experience of practical production work – whether managing a news room or having sole charge of a camera – may generate a rich and detailed account of how learning has evolved, the New Ground Rules factor indicates a deeper commonality across a much wider range of more or less practical activity, including writing, reading and speaking, where learning is generated because students’ minds are suddenly focused in the spotlight of new rules and responsibilities. Much of this activity took place not on the News Day itself but in lesson time, as the next factor also demonstrates.

### 3.2.2 Help from Teachers

The second most consistent and explicit factor cited by students in accounting for their learning (with 22 comments) was having things told them or explained to them by teachers. Within the term ‘teachers’ we are including other support staff who normally worked in the schools or the CLCs, such as technicians, a community liaison officer and media specialists, but not the BBC mentors, whose role we discuss later (3.2.5). We are also including the lessons given prior to News Day as well as the help given by teachers on the Day itself. Students made a total of 22 references to this kind of support in explaining what helped them to learn things; 11 of these related to their nominated learning outcomes in response to the open-ended question. The following comment relates to an activity which was also observed by a researcher, and involved an adult (who was not known to the student) offering gentle encouragement before leaving her to get on with it by herself:

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you learn that? (to control the camera better)

**STUDENT:** Well when we were recording the… the lady said, ‘well why don’t you just try this out?’ And I tried it and I thought yeah that’s really good.

**INTERVIEWER:** And then you did it on your own?

**STUDENT:** Yeah.

The next comment relates to a more typical classroom situation with the teacher coming round to independently working pairs of students: this student recalls the annoying, but obviously memorable, process of finding out that what she had done so far was not what was required:

**INTERVIEWER:** And what about learning about speaking and writing as if you’ve got to speak it out loud?

**STUDENT:** In the beginning we had to write it and I was writing it out like some kind of story and then Miss ---- comes up to me and she told me that you have to… I had to talk to B---- and whatever I said I had to take it out.
At another school, several students cited the key facts and mnemonics provided by their teacher (drawn from the BBC website) as contributing to their learning about communication skills or, as in this example, about how news is put together:

INTERVIEWER: And then how to put together a story and the 90 words and stuff, how did you learn all that?

STUDENT: That was mainly on the sheets that Miss ----- gave out, telling us that 90 words is 30 seconds worth.

INTERVIEWER: And generally sort of putting together a news item, there’s more to it than 90 words isn’t there?

STUDENT: Yeah you have to get what you think is right for your age group that is going to finally hear it.

The majority of these comments (17), unsurprisingly, came from students at the two schools which had substantial schedules of pre-News Day lessons. The students at the school which only managed two brief sessions with the selected group cited teachers’ help much less, although some salient information did stick. This student, for example, has recalled something she thinks must count as ‘BBC values’ although she cannot remember the name of the teacher:

STUDENT: Like they can’t be biased, the news shouldn’t be biased.

INTERVIEWER: What, the presentation of the news shouldn’t be biased?

STUDENT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you learn that from?

STUDENT: One of the [X] [partner school] teachers told us about it.

INTERVIEWER: I see, so what did she say about it then?

STUDENT: How like when you’re writing up the script, you have got to include both sides of the story.

At the CLCs, staff could work more intensively with smaller groups and individuals. The first student in the following two quotations was helped to learn how to use editing software to trim and ‘book-end’ his news item; the second student who attended the other CLC recalled her first day there as the most salient factor contributing to her learning about news production:

STUDENT: He really gave us instructions on what to do and then he explained how to do it and sometimes he would come and see like what I needed to change. He helped me with like everything at the piece at the end, like how to do the titles on the thing.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know how to do that before?

STUDENT: No.
INTERVIEWER: …was there any particular part of the project that helped you to learn about how the programmes were made and how they were put together?

STUDENT: Yeah on the first day they were showing how all the computers and how to edit it and write down the auto-cue and all that stuff.

It might be expected that there would be a sharp division and contrast between the Help from Teachers and the New Ground Rules factors, given that the latter involved rules and imperatives extraneous to the classroom. This does not seem to have been the case. Despite their relative inexperience (as described in Section 1.6.2) it was the teachers who had learned many of these rules themselves from the BBC materials and were able to ensure that students were aware of them.

3.2.3 Unfamiliar Technologies

A number of students commented on both hardware and software which they had not used before, and which they felt had helped them to learn things. In some cases it was simply the process of learning the software itself which they volunteered as an outcome, but some also referred to ‘editing’ as a process enabled by the software. At both of the CLC-linked schools, 8 students in all (five boys and three girls) cited ‘software’ and/or ‘editing’ as something important, to which they had had access at the CLC and did not have at school. It is important to try and unpick what this may mean, as the students themselves, with their relatively brief access to the equipment, do not explain it very clearly:

Windows Media Maker [sic – he means Movie Maker] I hadn’t done the real thing on it yet, but that was like the first time of using it properly and I learned a lot like the titles and how to cut some bits and how to put in another place and found it really helpful.

You listen to it and say you’ve said something wrong and you say, ‘no I’ve got to take it out,’ you’d like stop it and then go to the end of it and cut that out and then put something else in.

Both these students are describing the software features that allow the editor to go back to the middle of the sequence, cut something from it and replace it with another item. Doing this involves more than simply knowing what the software’s functions are. It requires the editor to make judgments about the ‘flow’ of the sequence: not only what doesn’t work, but recalling or searching the stored clips for something that might work, and trying it out. When students start to do this, they draw upon their own knowledge of audio or moving image texts and generic forms (in this case, news) in order to make judgments about what does seem to ‘work’, and by re-cutting the sequence, they then gain an understanding of the medium itself. Andrew Burn and James Durran explain this very well:

…the students also learn through this kind of production activity a number of important features of the moving image: that narrative is constructed by juxtaposition and implication as well as by straightforward representation of events; that sound and image are independently variable; that pace contributes to suspense, and can be controlled in the editing software…

(Burn and Durran 2007, p91)
Without having more data on exactly how the students used the software, we can only speculate about the extent to which they may have realised how many more choices are available to news producers than those afforded by the processes of scripting and reading. We can at least say from the interview evidence that those who did have a chance to work on the software themselves did get to do more than simple assembly editing (just putting clips in an agreed sequence) but also made decisions about altering and re-inserting material which must have involved judgments based on the meanings afforded by the sequence. Given that students were mainly working at least in pairs for this, there is likely to have also been some shared thinking going on. In one of the CLCs, one student (who at home had the only computer in the house in her own bedroom) helped the other students to do what they wanted with it, as shown in this extract from a researcher’s observation notes:

R---- gets up and helps S----: ‘sometimes it needs to be longer you know when that’s down there you drag it…’

S----: ‘oh right just get rid of that bit.’

R---- helping other students. She seems to have an excellent idea of how this programme works: ‘that’s squashed together so it will be really fast…’

The teacher at this school confirmed that this led to further experimentation by all the students in the group. Her comment that ‘playing around’ with the software was ‘quite interesting to see’ indicates some recognition that this was probably a valuable process, although she still defines this as ‘skills’ rather than as ‘knowledge’ or ‘understanding’:

They had an opportunity to use the Audacity software, which I have used before, but our students we don’t have it on site at this school. So they were able to kind of play around with that and have a practice day and then on March 22nd sort of develop those skills further. So it was quite interesting to see them, I think R---- already knew how to use it, I think she had done it before, but the rest of them playing around with sound effects and interviewing one another; inserting their own interviews into the software as well.

In the third school, where students were working onsite in a familiar environment, it was not those working specifically on production for News Day who thought that access to unfamiliar technologies had helped them learn things, but the three students who were allocated at the last minute to documentary-making. The following student had identified learning ‘how to use a microphone properly’ as an outcome, but his account of how he learned this indicates that it included discovering that there are choices available to a sound recordist and that both practical and aesthetic factors could govern those choices:

STUDENT: Yeah there was one little one and one big one and the bigger one was harder. But the little one you just had to point it wherever you wanted it.

INTERVIEWER: So why was the big one harder?

STUDENT: Because it’s heavier. And it’s just like you need to get it a certain distance away sometimes.
INTERVIEWER: Not too close, not too far?

STUDENT: Yeah, because the other one just picked up anything, it was just like from all around... wherever you pointed it that was who was speaking, but with the other one when you pointed it, with the little one, when you pointed to the person you would hear them more clearly, but you could hear stuff in the background. And you can’t hear as much with the big one, because it picks up more sound from the person speaking.

We enter a complex and largely unmapped area when we attempt to identify the learning outcomes relating to the uses of technology in media production, and when we look for data to account for these outcomes. As David Buckingham has persuasively argued, the flexibility and control offered by digital technologies enables modes of learning and reflection that can blur the boundaries between ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ of audio-visual texts and have potentially enormous implications for the concept of ‘literacy’ itself (Buckingham 2003, Chapter 11). Neither students nor teachers yet have a shared vocabulary of terms to articulate what goes on in such activity.

The teachers’ comments on technologies that were unfamiliar, both to them and to the students, reflect the prevailing discourse about ICT in schools, which tends to defer to the expertise of technologists rather than to explore cultural or creative possibilities:

TEACHER 1: …the only thing that I can think of was some of the software that we used, but I had never used before, where you slice music...

TEACHER 2: Oh yes, the technical!

TEACHER 1: The technical.

INTERVIEWER: And you learnt that on the pilot day?

TEACHER 1: Yes, the pilot day. And that was quite good in terms of I didn’t even know that the program existed, which would be a quite useful program to use with kids.

INTERVIEWER: Would you ever bring that into school?

TEACHER 1: I mean it would be something that in the long term we could talk to the ICT department that could be something that you develop?

TEACHER 2: Yes, probably we could do it... a form of it...

TEACHER 1: And that was probably the only thing that I didn’t know about at all and probably a little bit technical...

TEACHER 2: Technical yeah.

The CLC Centre Manager who worked with these teachers did identify teachers’ caution with ICT as an issue, but at the same time revealed his own predisposition to define the issue as simply one of technological expertise, rather than a wider
question about what other learning the technology might enable, which is probably what teachers would understand by the expression ‘run with it’:

This project just showed me that the fact that some of those teachers, English teachers, weren’t able to run with it, you know, very easily, even the schools that did it, you know, intensively… They found the media technology side particularly difficult: they had never used MovieMaker and MovieMaker is something that you could show a child… I’m not being flippant, but you could show a child.

In summary then, although a number of students referred to their encounters with unfamiliar technology as a contributory factor to their learning about ‘how news programmes are put together’, their comments only provide minimal indications about what this learning process really entailed. These indications do however lead us to speculate that through these encounters, some of them may have begun to acquire insights into the operations of these technologies that could have contributed to higher level concepts about news and news production, had they had more opportunities to reflect on what they had been doing.

3.2.4 BBC Materials

Materials from the BBC School report website, in particular the 10-minute Huw Edwards videos, were mentioned by several students as important contributions to their learning about how news programmes are put together and to the development of their communication skills. Four students explicitly ascribed their volunteered learning outcomes to the videos, but many others referred to them at some point during their interviews, usually as ‘the video’ or by mentioning the ‘three Cs’ and/or the ‘five Ws’, although what these stood for was not always remembered:

I can remember some. But some of the other things that we wrote down I would have to take a while to think of or I would just have to go and look at them. But most of them I remember.

The video itself was clearly salient for many students at all three schools, even though they could not necessarily recognise or remember who presented it:

STUDENT: I learnt that sometimes they have to take a couple of takes to make sure that you say you like… so one’s not biased, so you don’t sound emotional and stuff, because that’s the way the news thinks. That certain thing is wrong or whatever something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you learn that from?

STUDENT: It was on one of the videos, it was like don’t be biased.

Because they showed you a programme at the start where like a news presenter told you everything about it and like step by step talked you through it.

And we learnt, because we watched these videos of the person who works on the BBC news, he does the news and we watched that and we learnt how people want to hear the news and stuff like that.
The students at the school which scheduled several weekly lessons on news, each one based on a BBC video, did manage a total of 14 name-checks for Huw Edwards, although in one case the response was not very positive:

Yeah every lesson we had to listen to Huw Edwards at the beginning and he would go on for ages. He was like... he always said the same stuff and we went over everything he did last week. So it ended up... at the end of it, it was like three times as long as the beginning one. And then it ended up being ten minutes at the end, he made this big speech about everything that we had done and what we were going to do, so that was a bit annoying. That was it really.

Nevertheless, this same student later made several other references to Huw Edwards as a friendly and helpful figure:

Yeah Huw would show an example to us and the way... the techniques he uses to make sure. The way he finds it easier and stuff like that to write and read and stuff like that, it's how he prepares for his news reports and stuff.

But it was the teachers who referred most to the videos and to the BBC materials on the website and the DVD sent to schools. Some of them made direct claims for the impact of the videos on students’ learning:

It clearly very much sort of stuck in their mind. I think it's probably due to, a lot, to the visuals.

Beautifully prepared resources and well prepared videos, high status people involved in it, which involved the kids. Very easy to access and to use, so it was very, very good.

There was quite a lot of information from the Huw Edwards video that had been put together. So they found quite a lot out from there. Also in the BBC website we used that to go through how radio broadcasts are compiled as well as television.

Given that 'help from teachers' was the second most-cited factor for students accounting for their learning (see 3.2.2), we can infer, from the fact that the teachers stressed their dependence on the BBC materials, that these materials were indirectly, as well as directly, a significant influence on students’ learning, in particular contributing to their understanding of how news programmes are made. They were also cited by students in relation to other learning outcomes in response to prompted questions: for example as a source of understanding about audience expectations, BBC values, speaking and writing skills, and being a journalist. The influence of the videos in particular seems to have been important both for the students who had scheduled lessons on news, and the ones that did not.

3.2.5 Contact with Experts

The nature and amount of students’ direct contact with media professionals differed substantially between the three projects. A BBC mentor attended one of the CLCs and worked closely and consistently with students throughout; but at the other two schools all but one of the students never saw a mentor at all. However, students at these schools both had opportunities to see the news teams who had arrived to cover the News Day for local or national news, and in one case to ask them...
questions. In addition, some of the students working with a partner school where the level of student expertise was much higher also felt they had learned from watching them work.

Where there was direct contact between students and media professionals, students in two cases drew on this to account for what they now felt they understood as ‘BBC values’, even though the actual contact time was only 18 minutes:

And when we were on the BBC bus [sic: she means Outside Broadcast van], the two people on the bus were telling you how good it is and what you do and it’s really good fun. Because they go round, it’s for the radio I think, they go round the world, well not round the world, but go round the different areas and do the news.

In contrast, the second comment comes from a student who was, unusually, in close contact with the mentor for a whole morning, and who explained how it was her commitment to honesty and objectivity that enabled him to understand what ‘BBC values’ are and to trust the BBC more than he had before:

She told us on one of the preparation days that some of the stories that she had on the BBC and she was saying how she liked working with them, because all they do is honest. And it has kind of made me think more about, because when you’re doing stories you really have to check over and over again, because if you get anything wrong in a story, it can be really bad. So it has made me believe more of the BBC stories I suppose you could say, because they have got that reputation.

Although only two students cited this kind of professional help in accounting for the learning outcomes they had volunteered, two others, both from the school where the mentor worked with all the students, did cite it to back up their answers to prompted questions:

INTERVIEWER: What about the information permissions?

STUDENT: That was [at] the CLC, the lady from the BBC told us about that.

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I think my speaking skills and my reading, writing skills have been improved, because when you’re writing we have to make sure that it makes sense and the BBC lady she came and told us what to write, like when there was some errors she told us what to write...

Backing this up, the CLC Centre Manager who led the sessions with the students was enormously positive about the role of the mentor:

…areas as a teacher you would miss or you don’t miss, but you can’t emphasise if you don’t have the skills or the experience to bring… for example probing in depth, and issues of honesty, truth and validity, which are co-journalistic skills, which a teacher can do, but can only talk about it from a distance so cannot bring that depth to the experience. I think issues like that, also the quality of the written work for example, to know a journalistic style, give them some tips,
some real life tips so maybe using asterisks or using hyphens or dashes to help them with their punctuation... the presentational style, giving them presentational tips when they are actually doing presentations you know styles for that, or techniques about how to sit, how to time yourself, how to read, how to present, how to focus on x... giving them, actually sitting and scripting with children or shadowing the scripts and their writing. So I think there is a whole host of skills that they were able to bring which had a different dimension from the different previous journalistic projects that I have done and other teachers I know have done.

It is interesting to see so much weight given to writing skills generally assumed to be the province of English teachers, from 'using asterisks or using hyphens or dashes to help them with their punctuation' to 'issues of honesty, truth and validity', but he may well be right that hearing this from a media professional rather than – or as well as – from a teacher can have more salience for students: another possible example of the New Ground Rules factor.

Several students who saw others at work, in the two schools that had visits from BBC news teams on News Day, regarded this as a good way of learning about how news is put together. This student saw media professionals working and, as part of a mixed group on her first day working with the partner school, she got to see much more skilled students at work. She felt that both experiences helped her to learn about how news is put together:

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you learnt anything through doing this project?

STUDENT: Yeah lots, especially about the news, because we were looking at how they do that and all that.

From these experiences she picked up on a specific feature of news production which seemed important and clever to her:

STUDENT: You know on the news where they'll say like, 'over to this…' and then they'll start speaking, it's a bit weird, but now I sort of get it, because they will have been speaking and then they'll have had some sort of recorder and ages ago they will have recorded that, but I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER: So it's not necessarily live?

STUDENT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: It's just that someone switches… starts playing…

STUDENT: [cuts in] Like they have already got ready for it and all that. And they are not just doing it at that moment.

Another student noticed the same device from watching the visiting news team:

Well I used to think that all you do is you get the camera and you press like record and stuff, but they did breaks in it as well, they have got like pieces they go to, and then they press all the different buttons. And everyone has to work as a team, there's not just like
one person, there is about ten of them in this like the studio bit. And all facing our shots, telling us who’s going on here and they have got a little screen with what you have to say and everything.

Both students are talking about pre-recorded (or ‘as live’) inserts, a topic that was not, as far as we can tell, explicitly taught during the project, but which they were both able to see when they watched more expert people at work. Both identified key elements: the ways that inserts are introduced (‘they’ll say like, ‘over to this…’; ‘telling us who’s going on here’); the pre-recorded nature of the insert material (‘ages ago they will have recorded that’; ‘they have got like pieces they go to’) and the use of autocue to ensure smoothness of delivery (‘they have got a little screen with what you have to say’).

Another student noted the use of background images in TV news just from watching partner school students at work, even though she herself was learning about radio news production:

STUDENT: All the different backgrounds you can get, where it actually looks like you’re there and you have got to stand in the right position so it looks real. And when they’re doing weather, they’ve got to point at the right places.

INTERVIEWER: Are you talking about TV news there?

STUDENT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Because although you didn’t do any TV, you saw the [X] [partner school students] doing theirs?

STUDENT: Yeah.

The fragmentary and opportunistic nature of these students’ observations cannot constitute reliable evidence about the value of seeing experts at work, although for some students the chance for insights into professional practice – as with their approval of the Huw Edwards videos – was clearly something they enjoyed and remembered. But it does lead us to speculate on the possibility that, if students seemed to be able to extrapolate quite important aspects of news production from these fleeting glimpses, then perhaps their capacity for more sophisticated learning about the nature of news production may have been underestimated.

3.3 Other factors that may have contributed to learning

The five factors described so far in this section were those presented by students and teachers as making significant contributions to learning outcomes: both those that student volunteered in response to the open-ended question, and those that they identified in response to prompted questions. In post-project interviews, students were asked to describe what they had done in the project before they were asked about whether they thought they had learned anything. From these descriptions, we have identified two other elements of the project that we think are likely to have contributed to learning, although students did not themselves make this connection.

3.3.1 Working with Others

In all three schools, some students had to work with people they didn’t normally work with, or even with people they hadn’t previously met. This was because students
were selected from different classes to work on the project: at one school for the two pilot days and the News Day; at another, with the partner school at the CLC for the two preparatory days and the News Day; at the third, just for the News Day itself. The students who had to work with other students from the partner school made a number of comments about how this made a difference to them as a person or to their attitudes to school. It is important to note here that there were stark differences between the two schools in terms of social class and educational facilities.

STUDENT: When I went I didn’t know that many people who went, but now I do.

INTERVIEWER: What sorts of things do you know now?

STUDENT: Like I know more people, if I see someone from [X], [partner school] then I know them and I’ve learnt some stuff.

I feel more confident working as a team now.

Like since like all the people were so friendly and helped you feel more confident and be more friendly around people

The students who attended a CLC for two pilot days and News Day had to work in pairs with people from other classes whom they didn’t know, which required them to learn how to cooperate, and which this student said helped to make a difference to him as a person:

How to hear like… know our story, you had to write… one person can say that how to tell others, cooperate with others so we can tell them what to do.

But at the other school where students were working with people they knew, they still had to negotiate directly with each other in editorial and management decisions, which seemed to have enabled some to learn new ways of settling arguments:

…we all had to agree on what we’d put so if somebody didn’t like it they gave their idea and said well how about if you changed it to this and we all had to agree. And it was quite hard really because with the adult one, you could just say, right adults would like this. And then everyone would be ok, but we all have different opinions, so we all had to work out a way of putting it all…

Another student at the same school had the unusual experience of having to give instructions to one of the radio studio technicians:

STUDENT: I had to tell him what to do and I found that very kind of…

INTERVIEWER: He’s an adult?

STUDENT: Yeah. I found that quite hard, but I got used to it.

INTERVIEWER: You felt you learned how to do that?
STUDENT: Yeah it helped you how to speak to people, so you don’t insult them, but you make sure that they do understand you and make them do it.

3.3.2 Working Independently

Students were specifically asked about whether their ideas got taken up and used, but in addition several described working on their own and making their own choices, for example selecting their own news item to write up by searching for something that interested them on the internet; working on their own, for example going off to interview people by themselves; making their own creative decisions; expressing their own views:

We done it in school once as well where we went to get like other people’s views and it was me and H--- were doing healthy eating and we went to find out.

STUDENT: Yeah we used charts to present our data. It’s better to use charts rather than just writing it.

INTERVIEWER: And whose idea was that?

STUDENT: That was my idea.

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INTERVIEWER: And when you were actually filming, were you making decisions about going in for a close up and panning around and all that sort of – you were making that entirely by yourself…?

STUDENT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Had you done that before?

STUDENT: Not really. I’ve done videoing before, but the particular people in my group kind of just bossed me around and told me what to do and wouldn’t let me do the videoing for their own stuff.

INTERVIEWER: So this was a bit different, you had…

STUDENT: It was only me. I made my own decisions.

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INTERVIEWER: So what was different from going to the CLC then?

STUDENT: You had your own space and you had your own computer to work on to make your own story.

INTERVIEWER: And you could research on a computer?

STUDENT: Yeah, researching different type of stuff.

During our observations of the case study students at work on the News Day, we saw numerous instances of students getting on with their work by themselves or with their partners: sometimes by default due to distractions or crises elsewhere. But it
also seems that in the classroom sessions as well, students in two of the case study schools were required to do their own research to find topics that interested them to use as news items:

It looked like they had selected stories about subjects which personally interested them e.g., four boys out of six selected sport-related stories, two girls out of three, animal cruelty stories.

[Observation Notes]

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INTERVIEWER: What was your main news about then?

STUDENT: The redevelopment of the docks, down at [X].

INTERVIEWER: And why did you pick that one?

STUDENT: Because I live down there and I wanted to know what was happening, because it’s really like unsafe and it’s just not right.

On the News Day we observed a large amount of lightly supervised paired or group activity, given that the adults were all occupied with other tasks for much of the time. This varied from being intensely focused, through relaxed but mainly purposeful, to more or less off-task. At one project, the fact that two students had an angry exchange over how to deal with the story of Bob Woolmer’s death shows how deeply they had committed to the project; both referred to the development of this story in their post-project interviews to illustrate how they had had opportunities to be creative.

At another school, a trio developing their own interview (i.e. with each other) had an intense negotiation over the exact wording of one response, led by one boy who was determined to get an outcome; again, one of these students later referred to ‘teamwork’ as something he felt he had learned. However, it was only at one project that students genuinely worked as a group on the whole format of a radio broadcast without direct adult supervision — although there were three adults around to provide help when needed. This followed the established practice in this school’s newsroom where daily bulletins are prepared in similar conditions.

In some senses both of these factors (Working with Others and Working Independently) could be seen as another aspect of New Ground Rules, in that students found themselves placed – sometimes unexpectedly – in a new situation. But the key element here is that in both cases – whether working with others or working independently – students had to draw upon their own resources and judgments, rather than confronting externally-imposed imperatives. Given that a number of students cited ‘confidence’ as the thing that had changed them as a person, it seems likely that these aspects of the overall experience may have contributed to this and to the positive attitudes that many students expressed.

### 3.3.3 Enjoying It

We did directly ask students whether there were any specific aspects of the project that they enjoyed, and most of them responded positively. But half of them also mentioned enjoyment and fun in their responses to other questions. Sometimes this was specifically linked to a learning outcome. The following three quotations assert
enjoyment as a factor contributing to three outcomes: watching the news more, feeling more positive about school, and changing personal aspirations:

It’s more enjoyable because you’ve been doing it, you find it more enjoyable and then you watch yourself on it and it’s good. And then you want to watch the news all the time, because it gets more interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Why has it made you more positive?

STUDENT: Because like me, I got chance to go out with the school and they took us to the BBC, it’s much fun doing it that way.

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I had a good time at the CLC so I started thinking about taking journalism as a job and a teacher.

Several students cited enjoyment as a general comment on the whole project:

INTERVIEWER: Well that’s all my questions, is there anything else you’d like to mention?

STUDENT: Yeah I really enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER: You enjoyed the project?

STUDENT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Which bits, doing it in the classroom or going to…?

STUDENT: At [X] [the CLC].

INTERVIEWER: And what did you really enjoy about it?

STUDENT: The filming it.

INTERVIEWER: That was the best thing for you?

STUDENT: Yeah.

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INTERVIEWER: When you say ‘good’ on the day, which day in particular?

STUDENT: All of them.

INTERVIEWER: All the three days?

STUDENT: Yeah, they were really, really good.

The students themselves tended not to make explicit links between enjoyment and learning except when prompted to do so, but when asked about what they enjoyed, most nominated something that correlated with the learning outcome they
volunteered later. However, two students equated enjoyment with lack of challenge and, by implication, 'not learning':

At first I thought it was going to be hard, but when I got into it, it was quite easy.

No, it was a bit of fun, news isn’t for me. I wouldn’t go and be a news reporter. It was good on the day, I really enjoyed it.

But in both these cases, we do not want to assume that things that students have described as ‘merely’ enjoyable have not contributed to learning. Student comments about ‘hard’ and ‘easy’ work are uncertain guides to the learning that actually went on; enjoyment can be a sign of learning, as these two teachers instinctively asserted:

I think anything excites children and anything in which children are chosen and feel special and involved in, obviously gives them a real positive feeling about school and about their English lessons. So that would promote positive education.

But I would say that’s the bulk of the students over 99% really, really enjoyed it and learnt something from it.

3.4 Factors that may have limited learning outcomes

As we showed in Section 2, our overall finding is that the learning outcomes achieved by the participating pupils were reasonable but modest. In some areas, significant learning was achieved, but in others, the learning was partial and marginal. Although students’ learning was strong and prevalent in three areas:

ii) New insights into the news production process

iii) Improvements in communication skills

iv) Enrichments of journalistic skills

it was only moderate in five more:

v) Developing ICT skills

vi) Learning about audience expectations

vii) Learning about social and political acceptability

viii) Changes in the viewing habits of TV news

ix) Encouraging positive attitudes to school and learning

and there were twelve outcomes and objectives that were barely and rarely learnt:

i) Understanding what ‘news’ is

ii) News concepts such as impartiality, balance and fairness

iii) Broadening definitions of ‘news’

iv) The target audience for news
v) The importance of watching news
vi) Trust and belief in the news
vii) The role and skills of the editor
viii) Changes in listening to radio news
ix) Changes in the viewing of other TV programmes
x) Political awareness and informed citizenship
xi) BBC values
xii) Public service broadcasting

We consider here those factors which may have contributed to limited learning outcomes in some areas. Any failure to engage with areas where learning was expected needs to be investigated, given that future expansion of the project might magnify some or all of the problems encountered in our case studies.

3.4.1 BBC Guidance and Materials

The BBC’s general aims for the School Report project are ambitious and inspiring. It is clear from our research that the opportunity to learn from such a prestigious media institution was valued enormously by all our case study schools, and that these three schools did at least to some extent achieve the core aim of enabling students to make their own news material in a radio, TV or web format, and to have it seen or heard by others.

But as we have shown in Section 1, the BBC’s aspirations go well beyond this product-led plan. They include the claim that the project will ‘leave a legacy of skills and understanding relating to journalism, such as critical thinking, research and communication’ and that pupils will, amongst other things, learn ‘where news stories come from’, and will learn ‘that news is made, and that there is a purpose behind the way it is made’vi. These statements imply the development of critical skills, but it is critical skills that figure predominantly in our list of ‘barely and rarely’ learnt outcomes. We know from our research that little attention was given to these aspects of learning about news by our three case study schools. And as we have explained in Section 2 (2.3.1) few of the students’ post-project concept maps showed any gains in this kind of learning. Although all those who did concept maps had had classroom lessons on news during the project, of the five who showed significant levels of learning, only two had actually participated actively in News Day activities on 22nd March; of the 19 who showed moderate levels of learning, six had participated in News Day.

But why was this aspect of learning about news so limited? One reason may be that the School Report website offers three rather different sets of rationales for the project.

- Curriculum Relevance

The BBC has promoted School Report as a project with wide curricular relevance which does not tie teachers down to an explicit set of learning objectives. This is understandable: to achieve wide buy-in, the BBC does not want to put teachers off with specific and prescribed learning. It does however need to emphasise potential links to the existing curriculum to reassure schools about the legitimacy of the

vi http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/5273684.stm#1
project. Thus the website provides what it calls ‘mapping’ of the project content on to curricular areas in English and Citizenship, and to PSE (in Wales) and Learning for Life and Work (in Northern Ireland). However, ‘mapping’ simply involves indicating possibly relevant sections of the curricular requirements. It does not include explaining how teachers might meet these requirements through the unfamiliar process of news making.

- **Journalistic skills**

These are the main theme on the School Report home page vii: the project will enable teachers [to] help students develop their journalistic skills and will support learning in schools by leaving a legacy of skills and understanding relating to journalism, such as critical thinking, research and communication, and will provide the opportunity for students to consider the responsibilities involved in producing and publishing/broadcasting their own content. The first question on the teacher feedback form is What journalistic skills did your students develop? Again, what actually constitutes ‘journalistic skills’ is not made explicit, though it may be assumed that this is what the sequence of skills in the six lesson plans is all about.

- **Media Literacy**

A third theme is signalled on the ‘Curriculum relevance’ page which opens by stating that media literacy is at the heart of the BBC News School Report projectviii. However, media literacy itself is not defined. No link is given to the Ofcom website where the only ‘official’ UK definition of media literacy resides: ‘the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts’ix.

It is likely that confident and experienced teachers will find these a helpful framework providing a great deal of scope for convincing managers of the importance of School Report, for identifying suitable curricular locations and for devising their own learning objectives. However, none of the teachers in our case studies described themselves as ‘confident and experienced’, and this is more likely to be the norm, given the low levels of media training available to most teachers. What they relied on exclusively were the lesson plans provided on the website, because, like many members of the public, they trusted the BBC implicitly. As one teacher said, ‘it comes along with the seal of approval; it’s come from the BBC. So it must be accurate and good.’

However, these materials set out only to describe the process of news production by the BBC. The focus is on end-product, with no space for a contextualised understanding of what news is, why it matters, how it can be vulnerable to manipulation and bias, and how citizens can make judgments as to its trustworthiness. So although the BBC makes claims for what students may learn from the project, the lesson plans themselves offer a limited set of objectives.

A potentially more challenging approach was offered in the DVD material sent to schools which included material for editing by students. However, the pedagogic model here was unhelpful, in that it instructed teachers to show the finished news items first, as models for the students, and then provided a collection of clips which in each case lacked the most exciting and interesting material used in the completed item. In addition, none of the items offered students an issue or controversy to tackle: all provided straightforwardly factual information. We are told by the BBC that very

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few schools used the DVD material: we have no evidence that our case study teachers looked at them, and they do not seem to have used them.

The ways in which students may develop their critical abilities and their capacity to question and evaluate what they see in the course of production activities have been documented by educational researchers. But this idea has been diluted in the informal discourse of many non-specialists in arts and media projects to create the assumption that any practical work will somehow “naturally” produce critical insights. Clearly this did not happen for most of the students in our case studies.

The KS3 curricular requirements, which the BBC quote in support of the project, demand an explicit attention to critical analyses of the media. For example, as part of the Reading curriculum at KS3 in England, students have to learn:

- How meaning is conveyed in texts that include print, images and sometimes sounds.
- How choice of form, layout and presentation contribute to effect (for example, font, caption, illustration in printed text, sequencing, framing, soundtrack in moving image text).
- How the nature and purpose of media products influence content and meaning (for example, selection of stories for a front page or news broadcast).
- How audiences and readers choose and respond to media.

Had the BBC materials and lesson plans been more clearly and explicitly tied to these requirements, teachers might have been able to take a more confident and consistent approach to the project, and the students might have learned more about such topics as ‘what “news” is’, ‘the role and skills of the editor’, ‘political awareness and informed citizenship’.

### 3.4.2 Differentiation and Expectations

The lack of well-grounded learning progression models and age-related standards for media education has often been noted and remains a problem. A report on media literacy education for 11-16 year olds for Ofcom in 2003 notes the following issues, which seem to be relevant to our case studies:

- Common weaknesses in teaching [media literacy] in school include
  - teachers' insecure subject knowledge;
  - lack of opportunities for students to make knowledge their own;
  - inadequate attention to or difficulty in tackling contextual factors.
- Teachers hold multiple but uncertain and contradictory rationales for teaching about the media.

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\(^x\) See for example Shirley Brice Heath and Elizabeth Soep (1998 -) “The Work of Learning at Youth based Organizations: A Case for the Arts” for submission to *Educational Researcher*
• There is a lack of agreed criteria for evaluating the quality of the practical work that students produce.

(Kirwan et al, 2003)

It this context, it is hardly surprising that teachers’ expectations of what students might achieve through the project were fairly unclear see (1.6.2), and that they differed in their estimates of what might be suitable for this age group. One teacher – working with a top English set – found some of BBC website material too easy for her students, while another thought it would all simply be better for KS4 than for KS3:

TEACHER: [I de-selected material] If I thought it was too simple for them or didn’t add anything.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of thing?

TEACHER: There was some online games about headlines and online games about, if something was… there was some little report or some video and then you asked questions afterwards and it was like is this a fact or is this true or is this bias. They know the difference between fact and opinion. They can identify that quite easily. So I de-selected that from what they were doing.

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I think for older students in the school, I think it would be an amazing opportunity. And I think the students would get a lot more out of it. I think as well, if I could turn back time and look at that list of students again and think about really what the outcomes would be, and what I want them to learn from it, I think I would have chosen myself other students who I think may have got more out of the project.

Two other teachers felt that some of the activities were too hard for their students, but in doing so revealed that they were unconsciously eliding categories of class, ethnicity and ability in order to make this assumption. Consequently the validity of this comment might be questionable:

However some of the tasks were pitched too high for our students, but this is always, always the case. As G--- said earlier on, all resources are pitched for white middle class children.

The CLC Centre Manager working with this school did not use the BBC materials at all in the sessions that he ran: it seems instead that he was guided by his previous experience in running TES News Day projects and based his approach on that.

The teacher who worked with a top English set estimated that it would have been the middle ability band in the class who had learned the most, and expressed concern about the lesson plans’ lack of differentiation: in other words, their failure to provide a challenge for more able students:

…then you have got a good three or four at the top end of the class who are just gifted and talented or particularly keen and they will have learnt the least I think.
We have some evidence that in two cases, high ability students got selected for tasks which were designed to show off the school, rather than selection being based on a concern for all students’ learning needs. At one school, where the management of the News Day was unconnected to the teacher who had been teaching the BBC-based lessons, several bright and highly-motivated students who were already involved in news production activities on a regular basis, got selected by media staff for production work on the day: the rest of the class had to make do with an ordinary classroom and domestic-style recording equipment to make their podcasts.

In another case study, a teacher-coordinator allocated a radio news activity to a partner school with multiple disadvantages, retaining the TV news activity for her own more privileged school. In the following quotation she rationalises her decision at first simply as acquiescence to the BBC’s request to use her project for news coverage, but later reveals her own assumptions about what the partner school would be capable of:

...he said if we are going to come up here and use you as our model school, we would be looking for a group of a children doing TV, another group doing radio and another group doing internet and it just seemed to be that it was sensible to say, well if you take on the radio project we'll stay with the TV one because we've done it already and if you slide in... I mean the schools are similar although different aren't they? So it's either recording sound, where they have to be very careful about their script and make sure they're painting their picture, because they haven't got their visual images. So I asked [X] [the case study school] if they would take on board the radio part of the project so they could feature as the school that did radio.

The assumptions here seem to be that the partner school students – and their teacher – would be better off confined to just one challenge (scripting) and would not be able to manage anything more complex; that radio news is inherently less demanding than TV news; and that a good rationale for which students should be chosen to do TV would be to use those who had done it before and so would put on a good show for the BBC, not those who had not done it before and would welcome a new challenge. The decision was not discussed with the partner (case study) school.

It may be related to the teachers' uncertainty or vagueness about any cognitive learning the students might be expected to achieve, that a number of students ascribed their learning to their own experience or common sense, rather than to anything they had explicitly been taught. This did not necessarily lead them even to basic media literacy understandings such as the constructed nature of visual images, as is shown in the following exchange about why the student believed TV news:

STUDENT: Well like when there’s no pictures, because pictures are like evidence. So anyone can say a lie but they can’t take a picture of a lie. So you’re just going to know.

INTERVIEWER: So if you’ve got pictures it’s more truthful do you think?

STUDENT: Yeah.
But in other cases, students claimed that their commonsense knowledge was already up to or ahead of what the project materials sought to teach them. So implicitly they are accounting here for a lack of new learning:

STUDENT: Like don’t assume, don’t accuse people, like if there’s a certain thing that has happened and it’s someone’s fault, you shouldn’t accuse them, you should hear both sides of the story.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you learn that from then?

STUDENT: I already knew that.

INTERVIEWER: You knew it already?

STUDENT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Before you did the project?

STUDENT: Yeah.

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I watched the news and I know what I like to see on the news. So when we made the programme I know what other people might want, to see what I want to see.

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STUDENT: Yeah you can’t be… like you can’t give your own opinions unless like… well you can’t really give your own opinions, because it might cause arguments and that.

INTERVIEWER: And did that come up in something that you were doing?

STUDENT: No not really, but I kind of know that anyway.

INTERVIEWER: You didn’t really learn that from the project?

STUDENT: Yeah, because my dad upsets people all the time, just little things that he says.

INTERVIEWER: So he’s not going to be reading the news?

STUDENT: No [laughter].

The extent to which students simply asserted their own prior knowledge and common sense, without reflecting on them or developing them further, raises the question of differentiation more widely: it may be that it was not only the more able students who were not challenged as much as they might have been.

There seems therefore to be a cluster of issues here about the overall expectations teachers have of Year 8 students’ ability to learn about news, but also about the lack of differentiation in the materials and plans provided, so that able students were not fully challenged. Clearly this raises questions not only about the materials and plans, but also about whether some teachers undertaking this project need extra training in
order to do it well, and if so, whether schools will be prepared to invest in this. Given that it was ‘help from teachers’ to which students ascribed much of the learning they did achieve, this would seem to be an urgent issue.

3.4.3 Planning and Management

As we have indicated in Section 1 (1.6.3.4) difficulties arose in two case study projects from the ways in which they were planned and managed, with one case study having particularly severe problems which were seen by the researcher on the News Day as well as being described in the post-project interviews by both teachers and students.

These students were not able to use the material they had prepared for News Day, but had to do what they could to complete ad hoc radio news items on the day, as well as providing background ‘busy work’ for the partner school’s appearance on live TV. The case study school in this project was also the one that did least pre-News Day preparation. Apart from the two visits to the CLC based in the partner school (the second of which also encountered problems due to poor communications) the selected students were taken out of regular lessons for just two short sessions with the teacher. Thus these students had no regular lessons on news with their peer group – something available to the students at both other case study schools.

It is noticeable that these students’ learning outcomes were more limited than those from the other schools in a number of respects. They showed fewer learning gains from their concept maps; gave fewer volunteered learning outcomes in response to the open-ended question; said little about learning communication skills; and nominated no learning outcomes in relation to scripting and writing for reading, journalism skills or audience expectations. On the other hand, they all volunteered learning outcomes about the news production process, and four of them showed some learning progression in their responses to the question about how you would explain what news is to an alien. Four students from this school were also emphatic about having enjoyed the project, although they also expressed disappointment and annoyance about what happened on News Day. The fact that they were ‘specially chosen’ did seem valuable to them.

Overall, it seems possible that these students were adversely affected at least to some extent by the organisational problems on News Day. But it is more likely that the shortfalls in their learning compared to the other two schools were linked to the ‘bolt-on’ nature of the project at this school, involving a small number of pupils pulled out of other classes specifically for the project, and no systematic course of work on news in familiar surroundings. This low level of commitment may well have been caused by the project’s recruitment strategy, which effectively created ‘second tier’ participants.

At another school, an ambitious programme of planned radio and TV activities and other off-timetable events took place on News Day, and a very small number of those students who had attended the School Report lessons actually contributed to broadcast or website items. At the same school, the teacher who had taught the ‘news’ classes throughout the term had no involvement in the main News Day activity at all.

The distinctive factor in this school that seems to have impacted on the number and type of learning outcomes was the decision to allocate documentary production tasks to three pupils who had virtually no prior experience of such work, but who did each get one-to-one coaching from experienced adults. The two girls in this trio
volunteered three learning outcomes each; the boy volunteered five. All provided unusual amounts of specific detail about what they had learned in practical terms. In contrast, the two highly able students who had major roles in the radio newsroom on that day did not volunteer any outcomes in relation to the practical aspects of this activity, with which they were already familiar. Like another very able boy in this group who was off sick on News Day, they still volunteered a substantial range of learning outcomes, but these mostly related to the pre-News Day lessons, about how news stories are put together and the 3-Cs, 5-Ws rules.

In the other case study school, there seem to have been far fewer planning problems. The school organised a week of pre-News Day lessons in English and PHSE for the whole of Year 8, so that there was a substantial sense of large-scale commitment to the project, and the selected group of students attended two ‘rehearsal’ days at the CLC before attending on News Day. The researcher observed a striking atmosphere of purposefulness and quiet excitement at the start of the day, with strong evidence of preparation beforehand.

However, what was also clear about this project was the almost ‘production line’ nature of the activity. The experienced CLC Centre Manager was able to identify from the start the kinds of activity that this group of students would be able to undertake in a day, with some preparatory work in school, and still be able to feel that they had all produced something at the end of the day (see 1.6.3.3). What this meant was that the students’ choices of topic were left very much to them, and were prepared in advance from ‘old’ news: there was no time for an extended editorial conference, for example, to select the pressing news stories of the day and to agree a running order. There seemed to be no discussion of audience interests and needs. Each pair of students was filmed by the CLC staff and told whether or not their performance was good enough or needed to be filmed again: no students got to use cameras or to decide how the presenters would be lit and framed. The items made by the students each functioned as a separately titled piece: there was no linking commentary to present all the students’ work as a single bulletin. These features were reflected in students’ volunteered learning outcomes which emphasised writing and communication skills far more than did students in the other two schools.

These choices were undoubtedly realistic in the circumstances, and the CLC Centre Manager’s aims were achieved as planned. The students did all get to work on MovieMaker and to ‘edit’ their own items – which certainly did not happen in either of the other two case studies – and some of them referred to this in relation to their learning outcomes. The Centre Manager ensured that the arrival of the BBC news team did not interfere with these students’ work, so that although he personally found it very disruptive and it prevented him from spending as much time as he wanted in helping the students complete their editing, this did also mean that the students didn’t see media professionals at work, which as we have shown was an interesting learning opportunity for some of the students in the other schools.

Overall, a key factor in the planning and management problems faced by all the case studies seems to have been the distorting effect of News Day. The high profile, promotional opportunities and potential excitement of the Day encouraged the schools to invest huge amounts of effort into making the Day as successful as possible, stretching their resources to and sometimes beyond their limits. The alternative scenario was that adopted by one of the CLCs: to formulate modest ambitions and to stick to them.

The result in all three cases seems to have been that the full range and potential of students’ learning were not addressed: there was not enough time for all students to
be fully involved in collective choices and debate about the news values of their
topics, or for them all to have closer involvement in decisions about filming and
ing editing; and little or no time was allocated to reflection on what they had done and
what it meant.

3.5 Summary

This section has presented two key findings about what contributed most to students’
learning outcomes:

• The strongest influence on students' learning was the opportunity afforded by the
project for students to be confronted by new ground rules for their work, different
from what they usually encountered in school.

• More learning took place in scheduled lessons prior to News Day than on News
Day itself, with the BBC lesson plans and the Huw Edwards videos having a
notable influence both directly on students and indirectly through their teachers.

Six other factors appeared to have influenced learning outcomes. The first three were cited
by some, but not all, students; the other three emerged from analysis of students’ accounts
of what they did on the project:

a) Unfamiliar Technologies

b) BBC Materials

c) Contact with Experts

d) Working with Others

e) Working Independently

f) Enjoying It

Three aspects of the project gave rise to problems which may have limited the level and
range of learning outcomes achieved by the students:

i) BBC Guidance and Materials – which cited three different kinds of learning
objectives and did not offer enough support to less experienced teachers;

ii) Differentiation and Expectations – the general lack of consensus about appropriate
types and levels of media learning for different age groups and ability levels, was
reflected in the relatively limited range of learning opportunities offered to students
in these case studies;

iii) Planning and Management – problems with the previous two areas fed into the
organisational challenges of the project, and the demands of News Day distorted
learning opportunities in all three case studies.

References


Section 4

Implications for Policy and Practice

4.1 Introduction

This section sets out the implications of the research findings for policy and practice. We hope that this section will be of interest not only to Ofcom and the BBC, but also to schools and to education policy-makers. This study was not an evaluation of the School Report project as a whole, but an investigation of learning outcomes for selected students in a small number of case studies, over a period of five months. Nor was it restricted to examining whether the stated learning aims were achieved: it explored all learning outcomes, intended and unintended. The status of our findings therefore relates to the range of types of data we have collected and the depth of our analysis, not to the quantity of data or the size of our samples. It does not claim to be representative, but its wider implications could nevertheless be important.

The evidence in this report indicates that overall learning outcomes for the selected students in the case study schools were reasonable but modest. The majority of students and their teachers felt that they had learned something from the project and had valued it. There were 8 main learning outcomes and the three strongest and most prevalent outcomes also related closely to the BBC’s own core objective of helping students to learn how news is made. But there was little or no learning about 12 other outcomes, most of which can be grouped into the area of ‘critical understanding’ of TV news, and which relate most closely to the curricular requirements for learning about non-fictional texts in Year 8. So there was also a significant bias in the learning outcomes towards knowledge and skills, with much less achievement in the area of understanding.

Although every effort was made to select case study schools that represented a breadth of types of school, the level of funding necessitated a very small sample, so we cannot know to what extent our case studies are representative of the full range of schools who participated in School Report, and we cannot project this pattern of learning outcomes on to the whole project. But any apparent shortfall in expected levels of learning should be taken seriously, the possible reasons investigated, and steps taken to try and improve future outcomes. It is likely that, as take-up of School Report expands, more schools may find themselves confronting challenges similar to those encountered in our case studies. We hope therefore that the arguments set out in this section may make a helpful contribution to planning for the future of the project.

The first part of this section (4.2) discusses the importance of the School Report project in the wider context of education for media literacy and how this may develop in future. The second part (4.3) refers back to the analysis of the BBC’s aims which was offered in 3.4.1, and explores the implications of restating more clearly the critical dimensions of the project’s learning objectives. Four further sections explore the implications of the research findings for the further development of the BBC resources (4.4), for the provision of mentors and training (4.5) and for the organisation of the project (4.6). The section concludes with a consideration of the implications of the research for education policy (4.7) and for Ofcom (4.8) and in the Summary (4.9) the suggestions made throughout this section are listed.

4.2 The Importance of the School Report Project

The idea that the UK’s public service media should collaborate more closely with schools is generally accepted by both the education and media sectors. But the relationship between these two sectors, as between any two different professions, tends to be clouded by failures
Lifeblood of democracy? Learning about broadcast news

In each sector to understand and appreciate the realities of the other sector's normative assumptions and working practices. In the School Report project the BBC made enormous efforts to overcome these barriers and, while we suggest in this section that the collaboration between educators and broadcasters could be closer still, the project represents an important step towards a better dialogue between the two sectors.

It is particularly striking that the BBC envisages learning about news as an entitlement for all KS3 students and as something to be embedded in the school curriculum, not as a special treat for a minority of gifted or older students, or as something only available outside school hours. The fact that such a major national institution regards media literacy as a general entitlement, not a special option, may send an important signal to Government.

Although the importance of learning about news was a key part of arguments for media education in the 1980s (see Masterman 1985, Chapter 5; Alvarado, Gutch and Wollen 1987, Chapter 3) it has proved difficult to support, develop and sustain teaching about broadcast news because of the ephemerality of the subject matter, and the effort involved in bringing current TV, radio or Internet news into the classroom. This is why classroom teaching about news in English or Citizenship tends to be based on newspapers, which can at least be quickly photocopied and studied in a more manageable way by classes of 30 students.

The point of news is that it is new. It is the arena in which the media and their audiences engage with events as they unfold, but this is exactly what makes it difficult for teachers and students to engage with it. The only major resources for teaching about news have been produced by the English and Media Centre, and, though their news packs are well-liked by teachers, the examples used have the predictable disadvantage of becoming quickly out of date. A major broadcaster thus has a potentially very important role to play in enabling school students to engage with the excitement and immediacy of news, and to understand why all the decisions made about what is shown and how it is shown have to be made quickly, to inexorable deadlines. This is the key concept behind News Day, and is why the BBC put such a huge effort into enabling school students to taste some of the excitement of working to deadlines while having to be accurate and objective. It is clear from our research that this did happen to some extent for all our case study students. But it is also clear that, in the process, some of the other key aspects of learning about news received less attention.

### 4.3 The Aims of the Project

One of the BBC project leaders stated in her baseline interview with us that ‘the news is the absolute life blood of democracy’. The interview revealed a passionate belief in the power of an honest, objective news service and fearless journalism to ensure the openness and accountability of democratic institutions in the modern world. We respect this belief and indeed as citizens we share the aspirations it expresses.

But as we have argued in Section 3, the aims of the project as set out on the BBC website presented teachers with a potentially confusing message. The ‘journalistic skills’ of making a news broadcast were stated as aims alongside meeting curricular requirements and attaining the goal of ‘media literacy’ with no clear account of how these three perspectives would really come together in practice (see 3.4.1). The teachers in our case studies, who did not have the time and/or the expertise to work this out for themselves, relied entirely on the BBC teaching materials, which not only focused exclusively on the first set of aims (‘journalistic skills’) but also provided everything from BBC sources. When we asked students about their view of BBC values, several related these to the project itself, seeing it as a deliberate effort to help them understand and appreciate the BBC. Some of the students did develop an increased trust in and respect for the BBC, but cited simplistic reasons for this: ‘they can’t take a picture of a lie’; ‘they can’t be telling people stuff that’s not real’; ‘I know how much work goes into it’.
An aim more fully commensurate with the ‘life blood of democracy’ aspiration would be to help young people acquire the critical tools to develop a fuller understanding of news and its role in modern society, by being enabled to view and analyse news from a range of different sources. This would serve not only the interests of democracy, but also the BBC’s own remit as an institution disinterestedly dedicated to public value. Demands for more attention to critical skills can invoke fears about the unwelcome intrusion of ‘theory’ into what is seen as an essentially practical project. Media professionals tend to be understandably impatient with the rather simplistic agenda expressed in one of our teacher interviews: ‘getting them to understand that it’s manipulated and edited for our consumption’. However, we hope that the BBC will be able to engage with the newer thinking in media education that is moving beyond both the ‘theory-practice divide’ and the reduction of critical thinking to a choice between ‘appreciation’ and ‘suspicion’ (see for example Burn and Durran, 2007; Buckingham, 2007). These issues are not confined to media education. Recent research into artists in education initiatives has shown that it is often the critical dimensions – exploring evaluation and meaning – which are overlooked in preference for the hands-on practical side (see Harland et al, 2005). In the Special Effects study, whose methods were to some extent replicated by this research, the findings from nine case studies showed “limited gains in critical analysis and interpretative skills; the communication of meaning in and through film; and social and cultural knowledge.” Where there were gains in these areas, they were associated with more extensive planning, a more equal partnership between teachers and media professionals, and a higher level of pupil “ownership” of the projects (NFER/BFI, 2007)

4.4 Resources

The materials provided by the BBC website were used in all three schools and were mentioned frequently by both students and teachers as making a contribution to learning outcomes. Many of the ideas and information mentioned by students in their post-project interviews (the 3 Cs and 5 Ws for example) came from the BBC materials. However, the lack of learning outcomes in a number of areas leads us to consider whether the resources could have contributed more to these areas of learning and might be developed to do this in future.

In their post-project interviews, the teachers told us about how they would want to approach School Report next time. Although they had been highly reliant on the website materials and were grateful for them, this did not necessarily mean that they were content with what they had been offered. Both of the following teachers wanted the project to be more challenging in terms of the topics that students addressed. The first teacher is implying that the decision to let students go off and choose whatever topic interested them (the policy in two of our case studies) was not enough:

I certainly think if I was to be involved with anything like that again, I would want to be a lot more involved and be a lot more prepared I suppose. It’s certainly opened my eyes to just how challenging an activity it was […] it’s certainly taught me if I was ever to cover something like this within the classroom, I would be encouraged to use more challenging topics, rather than playing it safe with the usual kind of topics that we use in schools.

The second teacher (who was from a different school) seems to amplify and extend this point, implying that students need a critical engagement with some news content in order to generate the kind of excitement – indignation even – that she felt would the drive their learning more purposefully.

I think what you would have to do is to set out with controversial stories that would provoke opinion, provoke bias, and give them,
give them something that goes back to the idea of the earlier question, social issues, controversial issues, politically correct issues. Be quite challenging explicitly from the outset and then maybe you would be talking well actually that child has now been galvanised into taking action and is really furious or delighted with what they’ve heard and they’re going to do something about it.

The concept of stimulus material may have been the idea behind the DVD that was circulated to participating schools, but as we showed in Section 3 (3.4.1) this was not used by our case study schools and we are informed by the BBC production team that it was generally little used. We have indicated in Section 3 what we think were some problems with the DVD material; the teacher’s quotation above reinforces the idea that Year 8 students need to be challenged and excited in order to start to see the importance of news and the issues that are involved in news production. Obviously there are ethical and legal issues about exposing some of the dramas and dilemmas of news production to students – perhaps particularly to this age group – but it is not necessary to confine them to anodyne versions of the process, or to imply that there is only one right way to tell a story.

The research findings indicate a need for greater differentiation of the tasks and concepts involved in School Report. One way of achieving this could be by extending the range of material to include more conceptually challenging tasks, to stretch more able students and to provide opportunities for middle-ability students to take their learning further. But more attention could also be given to the conceptual ‘groundwork’ for all students. The existing lesson plans and materials are based on the idea that students simply need to learn the steps of a professional process, but all students could find this more meaningful if they could gain a clearer understanding of context and purpose, in order to help them make sense of why professionals do what they do.

The following checklist outlines the kind of exercises that are typically used by more experienced media teachers but virtually impossible to undertake in respect of news due to the lack of access to appropriate material. The BBC perhaps could, uniquely, provide ‘real’ material to support such activities:

- Analyses of title sequences from a number of TV news programmes on different channels, to explore key elements in the representation of ‘news’ – such as urgency, importance, world coverage, immediacy – and how these are conveyed through sound (including music), image, colour and movement. Foreign news programmes could be included.

- Comparison of coverage of the same item by two or three different TV news programmes from different channels – foreign news coverage of a UK event could be particularly effective, set alongside indigenous news.

- Analysis of, and reflection on, the different elements of TV news presentation: newsreader’s direct address to camera, newsreader’s voice over visual material, pre-recorded interviews and film reports, live location reports, etc, using extracts from a range of news programmes.

- Analysis of, and reflection on, the common features of TV news presentation from a number of different programmes: setting, people (class, gender, ethnicity, accent, age and appearance), dress, performance style etc, and considering alternatives.

Production exercises could be more closely linked to analytical learning by being more constrained than those in the DVD resource, as shown in the following three tasks.
Additional, text-specific constraints could be added, such as not showing, or omitting references to, names or other features that could identify a person or place:

- Editing visual or audio material to a given length, say, from two minutes to 30 seconds, using ‘raw’ location or interview footage.

- Selecting (from material provided) and sequencing still and/or moving images to illustrate a given text.

- Editing a given text from, say, 200 to 90 words.

As the teachers quoted above have indicated, the question of topic is also crucial. This is not simply a matter of the level of seriousness of the item (the DVD included an item on a cat who inherited a house and others on the Asian tsunami and climate change) but on the potential of the item for real and specific moral or political dilemmas. An example of the kind of open moral issue likely to stir up interest and strong views in students of this age would have been the scavenging of cargo from the wrecked MSC Napoli off Branscombe beach in January 2007. The implications of both teachers’ comments is that such material would need to be deliberately selected and presented, and students alerted to potential bias by being specifically asked to make their own choices between certain images and words (e.g. ‘scavenger’ vs ‘looter’); perhaps with different groups of students instructed to take a different ‘line’ on the story.

These suggestions are based on existing good practice in Media, English and Citizenship teaching at KS3 and above. While they might not be taken up by all schools at the outset, they could help to set a standard for less experienced teachers to follow. Further development of School Report resources could be done in dialogue with experienced teachers who have taught about news at KS3, working perhaps with key agencies such as the English and Media Centre and the Media Education Association.

4.5 Mentoring and Training

Those students and teachers who did encounter a BBC mentor (all of them at one school; one student at another) were extremely positive about the experience. The BFI’s evaluation of Channel Four’s Breaking the News project also found that teachers identified access to mentors as the most helpful factor in the support they had for that project. But there are clearly difficulties and challenges for the BBC in maintaining this provision as they also want to expand the project in future years. Their plans for building contacts between journalists and schools at local level are admirable, especially as they realise that the benefits are mutual: journalists have as much to learn about schools as schools have to learn about journalism.

But the research shows that there were difficulties, some of which were simply not overcome, in enabling contact between mentors and teachers, let alone between mentors and students. Professional pressures on each side make meetings and visits extremely difficult to arrange, and it can be hard for media professionals to understand why schools cannot be flexible about dates and times (because of the knock-on effect on other students and teachers in a timetable involving perhaps 1000 people) and why teachers do not find it easy to read and respond to e-mails or to answer phone calls in the course of the school day.

However, the value of the mentors to the project (and perhaps also to the media professionals themselves) is such that the BBC might consider it worth addressing as a policy issue and part of its public service remit to explore how their staff might be enabled to act as mentors to media teachers and students in schools. This might also be considered
more widely, for example by BECTU or Skillset, as an opportunity that could be available to freelance journalists and other production professionals, given appropriate briefing, training and CRB clearance.

There are obviously considerable resource issues here, not least of which would be ensuring that educational professionals had adequate input to the planning of clear and appropriate mentor remits and training. Qualitative feedback from schools into the BBC’s own evaluation of the mentor system would be helpful here: the data on mentors’ roles from our research is too sparse to inform detailed planning.

None of the teachers we spoke to had had any training to help them teach about news for this project. The general lack of both initial and in-service training for media teaching in the UK has been frequently commented on, and it is clear that, without training, many teachers will not take advantage of the opportunities offered in the BBC’s website material to select and adapt what is there. The Mapping Media Literacy report for Ofcom, which was well-informed by Ofsted evidence, had this to say:

Most schools have just one or two teachers with a higher level of expertise, or no-one at all, and the coverage of mass media in English can be quite restricted. Teachers skill themselves up through in-service courses or just through teaching themselves. Teachers with media expertise just move on, partly because there is little career progression for them in media studies.

(Kirwan et al, 2003, p53)

The same report notes very limited opportunities for professional development, disproportionately available just in the south-east and a few other regional centres, with a reluctance by schools to pay for such training unless it is linked to a specialist course such as A Level Media Studies. It adds that ‘ICT teachers and technicians are rarely trained to reflect on the medium they are using’ (ibid.)

In this context, the prestige and profile of School Report could have a significant impact on awareness at school management level and perhaps also at the level of the Training and Development Agency (TDA) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), of the need for teachers to have appropriate training if they are to deliver this project effectively. Such an impact would be more likely if the project’s learning objectives had more explicit links to the curriculum and if the BBC were prepared to make it clear to schools that teachers might need access to training for the project in order to teach it effectively.

It would not be necessary for the BBC to provide training directly. A number of agencies in the UKxi would be willing and competent to provide it (and indeed the English and Media Centre is already offering courses to support School Report teaching, and has received a grant from the TDA to develop a network of London schools to develop CPD specifically for teaching about broadcast news). What would also stimulate this provision would be relatively small amounts of ‘high level’ training for training providers, and a ‘resources hotline’ enabling them to understand the principles of the project and to keep abreast of support materials and other features as they develop.

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xi English and Media Centre, Media Education Wales, National Media Museum, Bradford, the Creative Learning Centres in Northern Ireland, the British Film Institute, Children’s Express, and Regional Film Theatres in Bristol, Southampton, Sheffield, Cambridge, York, Manchester, Derby, Leicester, Nottingham, Newcastle upon Tyne and other locations. See also the BFI’s Associate Tutor scheme at http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/contacts/assoctutors/.
4.6 Organisational Issues

As Section 3 shows, planning and management problems contributed to some of the shortfall in learning outcomes that we identified in Section 2, but they also made life more difficult for those who were trying to teach and manage the project. Some of these problems originated in the schools themselves, but where they did, they will have been exacerbated by the tight timescale and, as we have argued in Section 3, by the high profile and unique opportunities offered by News Day itself. It would be regrettable if schools were to be put off by the organisational challenges of the project and pulled out.

There is obviously a dilemma here. There is a tension between the pressures placed on schools who perceive themselves to be in a competitive marketplace and thus needing to seize whatever opportunities they can to get positive public exposure, and the professional responsibilities of schools to ensure the best possible learning opportunities for all their students. This is a tension not of their making and we have witnessed the stress it can produce for school management teams.

The key issue therefore is how the real priorities of an educational project like this can be identified and agreed by all stakeholders. To do this involves understanding how schools are likely to respond to the offers made by external agencies. It was certainly never the BBC’s intention that schools would select only their best students for the project, or that it would be perceived simply as an ‘extra’ to reward certain pupils or to alleviate the general boredom of Year 8, but we know that in the three schools we visited these things happened and it is to some extent understandable that they did.

Some organisational problems are inevitable in the first year of a project and this is why the BBC planned the first year as a pilot. But if the second year involves a substantial expansion of the numbers of schools involved, then ways need to be found of encouraging and enabling schools to widen access to the project, if the BBC is to realise its aspiration for making news a normal part of the KS3 curriculum.

This could mean that the BBC might strike a clearer balance between the public profile of the project and more robustly defined learning objectives, particularly if these can be more explicitly linked to the curriculum. It could also, as we have indicated at the end of Section 3, require a rethink of the News Day concept, to find other ways of making students’ work public that would put less pressure on school staff and management. The evidence of one of our case studies also suggests that by using ‘remote control recruitment’ of schools through CLCs or Specialist Schools, the BBC risks creating ‘second tier’ participants who have a less clear grasp of the project and benefit far less from it.

4.7 Wider implications for education

The factors most frequently identified by students as contributing to their learning will not be surprising to educators. They were:

- New Ground Rules
- Help from Teachers
- Unfamiliar Technologies
- BBC materials
- Contact with Experts
Three other factors also seemed to emerge from students’ other comments both on what they did and what they felt they had learned:

- Working with Others
- Working Independently
- Enjoying It

While it is encouraging to see that students did identify their teachers and the BBC materials as important in helping them to learn, it is notable that the other main factors – including New Ground Rules, the one most often cited – are ones that are particularly difficult to provide for and manage in most schools. Together with the final three factors that were implied rather than directly nominated, the common feature here is the heightened element of real purpose and function: rather than producing work simply for teacher assessment, students found themselves confronting new imperatives, having to work quickly with hardware or software they had never used before, seeing or working with new people, taking responsibility for their own decisions and often having those decisions respected by others. Many schools do successfully ensure that students get to experience new situations and to learn from them without just being thrown in to sink or swim. But for some schools this may be difficult to ensure except as a special treat. The obvious fact of student enjoyment then becomes the main priority, rather than the learning that may also be happening. This was illustrated in one of our post-project teacher interviews:

And if any project that you do is fun, indirectly, makes them think that school is more fun.

The project was about using all these great resources to enthuse the children.

It is therefore a potentially important aspect of School Report that it can enable schools to put students into new situations where they encounter new demands and responsibilities, from which they are likely to learn things. The project also functioned to bring schools into new partnerships, with each other and with CLCs, and although there were problematic aspects to this as we have shown, the students clearly valued the opportunities this gave them to meet and work with new people and to use technologies that they had not used before.

None of the students we interviewed used a camera or sound recording equipment in the course of making a news item. The three who did use such equipment were making a documentary film for their school (or rather, recording material for later editing by someone else: by the time of the post-project interview, they had not seen the completed film). But all the students at the other two case study schools did either get to use editing software themselves or to see someone else using it, and many of them commented on this experience. We have explored some of the implications of this experience in Section 3 (3.2.3) and have indicated that the use of this software is a creative activity drawing on cultural knowledge.

Editing audio-visual material is potentially an important and perhaps unique way of learning about media language and generic conventions, but in young people’s practical media work it is the activity most likely to be excluded because of the time it takes and the management problems of enabling everyone to have a go (see NFER/BFI, 2007, section 5.7, and Reid et al, 2007). The evidence from our research about the value and nature of learning through editing is slight, but it is suggestive. As David Buckingham argues, a more conscious
attention to this process on the part of both students and teachers can be one way in to the kinds of critical understanding that our case study students did not appear to reach:

It may be that the ability to manipulate and edit moving images in digital format offers a degree of flexibility and control that particularly lends itself to the kind of self-conscious reflection that I have argued is essential to media education and to ‘critical literacy’ more broadly.

(Buckingham 2007, p186)

Future studies of young people’s creative work with moving image media could explore this area more fully. The potential impact on the ICT curriculum and practice in schools, of recognising the creative and cultural dimensions of this kind of activity, is substantial.

Perhaps the major implication of this report for the education sector is what it adds to the body of evidence about arts interventions in schools. Such interventions are least effective where they are treated as ‘special projects’, at a distance from the ‘real work’ of teaching and learning in school. The prevailing rhetoric, which we saw echoed in this study, presents a one-way process in which the external agency offers a ‘project’ (most often in the form of a product-led activity, as in School Report) which is then managed by teachers for the assumed benefit of students. What works better is what has been described as a ‘mutual learning triangle’ where it is recognised that teachers, students and the external agency all have learning and teaching roles to play (see Harland et al, 2005).

4.8    Implications for Ofcom

Ofcom’s decision to fund this research signals their acknowledgment that formal education has a contribution to make to media literacy. They have been criticised in the past for adopting a protectionist and instrumental view of media literacy; their interest in the learning outcomes of School Report will, we hope, contribute to their dialogue with the DCSF and other bodies whose role could be crucial in the development of media literacy, such as the TDA, QCA and Ofsted, and with the equivalents of these bodies in the other UK nations.

Ofcom can play an important mediating role between the media industries and education. It is understandable that media organisations have to work to their own agendas and priorities, and there is potential for these to clash with those of schools, as exemplified in these case studies by the feeding frenzy of news teams on the day, descending on schools, sometimes with little notice, and overriding school priorities, even to the point of excluding some students, as this teacher described:

I asked S---, who is the interviewer, if we could put the [X] [partner school] students in. And she said she didn’t want to change the format or the layout, because she had set up the room and she’d decided how the whole process was going to work. I just sort of did what she told me. I asked her if she could put them in and she said, ‘she’d rather not.’

Another teacher commented on the trivialisation of another news team’s approach, who asked for George Alagaiah and Siân Williams look-alikes from amongst the students:

It was more disruptive than anything else and just came in and sort of created a storm and then left, which actually I felt was very counter-productive to what they were actually trying to do. And I thought it was a real shame that when they came in they were just looking… they had set up this big project about them being depth
and about quality of writing and then they just wanted someone to look like a TV presenter which I thought was quite sad.

At the third school students waiting to learn how to manage live editing of their school’s news item were observed discussing the arrival of the BBC news team:

STUDENT 1: I reckon we won’t get lunch now.

STUDENT 2: We’re going to lose an hour of practising because the BBC want to get their news ready.

STUDENT 3: They’re setting up now.

These comments indicate that there is a need for some attention to the ethics of media visits to schools. It is particularly difficult for school managers to refuse media coverage, but they could be encouraged to assert their own professional judgment in the face of demands from media professionals that may lead to the disruption of students’ learning. At the same time, it is important to remember that a few of our students felt that they learned from seeing media professionals at work, so properly managed encounters could well be beneficial to learners.

Overall, there seems to be a need for a better-informed dialogue about media literacy between the media industries and educators, that seeks consensus without compromising the principles of either group. There is a dearth of new thinking about how to teach about news in the context of media literacy. There may be opportunities for Ofcom to broker collaborations between broadcasters, educators and academics to address these issues.

By putting the needs of learners first, it may be possible for both sectors to envisage the value of a constructive engagement with news, combining critical analysis with creative learning. Media literate people are not only able to make informed choices about what information sources they believe, but also to reflect upon why they have made these choices, and to articulate what they think good news coverage looks like.

4.9 Summary

In this final section we have offered a number of suggestions for consideration by the BBC, by educational bodies in all four UK nations, and by Ofcom. These are:

For the BBC

i) Clarification of School Report’s learning objectives with more detailed links to show how the requirements of the KS3 curriculum can be met and a clearer statement of critical skills as one of the objectives.

ii) Further development of the project’s online and DVD resources for schools, to support critical analysis of news and to provide students with more focused and interesting editing tasks.

iii) Investigate (perhaps with BECTU and Skillset) how to ensure continued and more substantial input to the project from mentors.

iv) Closer dialogue with leading institutions in the field of media literacy to develop the project itself and the wider principles of teaching about news in the context of media literacy.
v) Reconsideration of the timetable, scale and management of School Report to reduce pressure on school resources.

vi) Encourage schools to obtain professional development for teachers intending to participate in School Report and support providers offering such training.

For the Education Sector

vii) Schools could resist making School Report into a high-profile project if this would mean that a larger number or wider range of students could participate.

viii) Schools could build in School Report project time for students to work with editing software and to undertake critical analyses of news programmes as well as practical news production projects.

ix) National teacher training agencies could recognise the importance of both initial and continuing professional development for teaching about news media, and to support its provision.

x) National curriculum and assessment bodies and government education departments could explore and monitor the contribution that ICT-based creative work can make to students’ critical and cultural learning.

For Ofcom

xi) Could play a mediating role between the media industries and education:

a) To encourage attention to ethical issues in the ways that news media access schools and represent student learning;

b) To ensure that government education departments and national education bodies are aware of School Report and the nature of the learning it can enable;

c) To broker a dialogue between media industries and media educators about how best to foster student learning about news.

References


Follow-up interview schedule for students

LEARNING ABOUT TV NEWS
BBC NEWS SCHOOL REPORT

YEAR 8 PUPIL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
FOLLOW UP

To be carried out face-to-face and individually with the six pupils interviewed at the baseline stage (if any of the six are unavailable, replace with other children who completed the project and the baseline concept map)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Thank you for agreeing to talk to me again today, this should take about 30 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You’ll probably remember that I talked to you before the project on news started. Now that the project is finished, I want to talk to you to find out what you think you’ve learnt through the project and what you thought of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As before, the interview will be kept confidential – your teachers, friends and parents will not be told anything you say, so please feel free to say exactly what you think. And if we use anything you say in a report we won’t say that it was you who told us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If I ask you anything that you don’t understand, just ask me to explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do you mind if I record it?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**[MAX TIME: 2 MINS]**

Just to start with …
Please could I confirm your name on tape: it’s ………

A. What you did on the project

**[MAX TIME: 8 MINS]**

[On the back of a preparatory conversation with the link teacher about what the project comprised for the group, use this section to confirm and clarify what this pupil did throughout the project. Avoid getting into perceptions of what they learnt in this section – just their accounts of what they did and produced in the different sessions.]
A1. Can I just check whether or not you attended all the sessions of this project?

[Go through all the days, afternoons and sessions and establish if they attended: e.g. first day at college, second day in Feb, three afternoons at school, 22 March day, any follow-up sessions.]

[As appropriate] can you tell me why you missed X session?

A2. Can you tell me what were the main things you did in each of these days/ sessions?

[Go through the list again and prompt descriptive answers to the following, if relevant:]

- What were the main things you did?
- Where did the activities take place?
- Who taught you/ led the sessions? What did they do?
- What topic(s) were you working on?
- Who did you do those things with?
- What equipment did you use? How did you use it?
- What, if any thing, did you/ your group produce?
- Did you get a chance to be creative? Did any of your ideas get taken up? Which ones?
- Did you see and discuss other pupil’s work?
- Did you have to take any work away with you to complete in your own time?

A3. Was there any thing in the project [remind them that is all the sessions they did] that you especially enjoyed? If so, what was it?

Why did you particularly enjoy that?

A4. Was there any thing in the project [remind them that is all the sessions they did] that you especially disliked? If so, what was it?

Why did you particularly dislike that?

B. Impacts of the project: open-ended

[MAX TIME: 5 MINS]

[It’s crucial that we don’t offer any prompts that may predicate their responses in Section B.]

B1. Do you think that you’ve learnt any thing through doing this project?

[Make sure they know that ‘project’ means all the work they have done on it, e.g. both here and at college. Encourage just yes, no, not sure at this stage. If no or not sure/ don’t know, go to Question B5.]

B2. [If YES to B1] what do you think you’ve learnt or got out of it?

[If appropriate] Probe once: can you tell me any more about that learning?
B3. [If YES to B1] can you think of any thing else you’ve learnt or got out of the project?

[If appropriate] Probe once: can you tell me any more about that learning?

[Keep asking B3 until they can’t offer any more learning outcomes. Keep a rough list of each learning outcome mentioned.]

B4. [Taking each learning outcome mentioned by the pupil in turn] can you tell me which part or parts of the project helped you to get/ or learn ………… out of the project?

B5. [If NO to B1] why do you think that you have not/ are not sure that you have learnt any thing through the project?

Probe their reasons for reporting a lack of learning.

B6. Do you think the project has made any difference to you as a person?

C. Impacts of the project: prompted

[MAX TIME: 8 MINS]

I’ve got some questions now about some things that you may have learned more about through the news project. And I just wanted to go through these with you. Don’t worry if you don’t feel you have learnt about any of these things; just say you haven’t and that will be fine. If you feel you have learnt more about any of these, it would be good if you could give me an example or two.

Amend any of the following questions in the light of responses in Section B.

C1. OK, so the first one is how news broadcasts are made, how they are produced – do you think you have learnt any thing about that?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of production process]

C2. The second one is how the things that an audience might expect or want could influence the news – do you think you have learnt any thing about that?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of audience expectations – perhaps those that arose in their productions]

C3. The third one is how what you can say on the news may be influenced by what is thought to be socially or politically acceptable (for example, having to avoid reporting news or saying things that members of the audience might find offensive or be upset by) – do you think you have learnt any thing about that?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of the kind of things that may be unacceptable – perhaps that cropped up in their work]
C4. As you may know, this project was started and organised by the BBC. Do you think you have learnt any thing about what the BBC believes in, what the BBC thinks is important – what its values are?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of BBC beliefs values]

C5. Do you think that any of your writing and reading skills, or your speaking and listening skills have improved as a result of doing this project?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of skill areas improved]

C6. Do you think that you learnt any of the skills a journalist needs through doing this project?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of journalistic skill areas improved]

C7. Do you think that you learnt any thing from this project that linked to any other lessons you’ve had about the media?

[If time, probe for what other aspects of their media learning at school the project linked to]

C8. Do you think the project has made any difference to how you feel about school in general – has it made you more positive about the school? Has it made you less keen on school? Or has it made no difference?

[If time, probe for what aspects of project are thought to have influenced attitudes]

C9. Do you think that doing this project has made you more aware of politics and made it more likely that if you were over 18 you would vote in an election?

[If time, probe for what aspects of project are thought to have influenced political awareness and attitudes]

D. Your experience of news broadcasting

[MAX TIME: 3 MINS]

D1. When I interviewed you last time, you said that you watched TV news ................

[insert their last answer]

…… is that still the same or has your viewing of TV news changed?

[If appropriate] has the news project affected how much and how you watch TV news?

D2. Has the news project influenced how much and how you watch other TV programmes?
D2. Has the news project affected how much and how you listen to radio news?

E. Your attitudes to the news

[Max time: 4 mins]

E1. When I interviewed you last time, I asked you how you would explain what news is to an intelligent alien. How would you explain it now?

[If appropriate] has the news project affected your explanation?

E2. As you may know, the person in charge of selecting the news that goes into a TV news broadcast is called an 'editor' – like an editor of a newspaper – what do you think an editor of a TV news broadcast has to be good at?

E3. What TV programmes would you count as news?
Ask them to give examples.

E4. Who are the main news programmes for?

Explore their views on intended audiences.

E5. Do you think it important to watch the news?

Why/why not?

E6. Do you believe what you see and hear on the news?

Why/why not?

[If appropriate] has the news project affected your explanation?

That's all of my questions for now. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much indeed. That was really interesting and very useful for the research. We're going to come back when the project is actually happening to ask you how you're getting on and whether you're enjoying it. Then we'll come back at the end of the project to speak to you again.

Thank you
**Annex 2**

**Follow-up interview schedule for teachers**

**LEARNING ABOUT TV NEWS**  
**BBC NEWS SCHOOL REPORT**

**TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**  
**FOLLOW UP**

**Introduction**

- Thanks again for all your help with this research and for making time for the interview today. This should take about 45 minutes; is that OK?

- As you know, in our research, we’re trying to find out what pupils learn through such projects as the one you have been involved in. Consequently, anything you can tell us about your perceptions of what the pupils have learnt, as well as your views on how the project went, will be an important contribution to the research.

- The interview will be kept confidential and the report will not mention the names of any individuals or schools.

- If I ask you anything that you don’t understand, just ask me to explain.

- Do you mind if I record it? It’s just a lot more accurate than trying to take notes.  
**[MAX TIME: 2 MINS]**

Just to start with, confirm interviewee’s name

The first two sections are about pupils’ learning. These are followed by some questions on whether you felt you learnt anything through the project.

**A. Impacts of the project: open-ended**

**[MAX TIME: 6 MINS]**

*[It’s crucial that we don’t offer any prompts that may predicate their responses in Section B.]*

**A1. Do you think that the pupils learnt anything through doing this project?**

*[Make sure they know that ‘project’ means all the work they have done on it, e.g. (if appropriate) both here and at college or the CLC. Encourage just yes, no, most, some, not sure at this stage. If no or not sure/ don’t know, go to Question A5.]*

**A2. [If YES to A1] what do you think they learnt or got out of it?**  
*[If appropriate] Probe once: can you tell me any more about that learning?*
A3. [If YES to A1] can you think of any thing else they’ve learnt or got out of the project?

[If appropriate] Probe once: can you tell me any more about that learning?

[Keep asking A3 until they can’t offer any more learning outcomes. Keep a rough list of each learning outcome mentioned.]

A4. [Taking each learning outcome mentioned in turn] can you tell me which part or parts of the project helped the pupils to get/ or learn .......... out of the project?

A5. [If NO to A1] why do you think that the pupils have not learnt any thing through the project?

Probe reasons for reporting a lack of learning.

A6. Do you think the project has made any difference to the pupils as people?

B. Impacts of the project: prompted

[MAX TIME: 14 MINS]

I’ve got some questions now about some things that the pupils may have learned more about through the news project. And I just wanted to go through these with you. Don’t worry if you don’t feel they have learnt about any of these things; it would probably be very difficult to achieve all the following as learning outcomes. If you feel pupils have learnt more about any of these, it would be good if you could give me an example or two.

Amend any of the following questions in the light of responses in Section A.

B1. The first one is how news broadcasts are made, how they are produced – do you think they have learnt any thing about that?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of production process. Probe whether TV or radio news or both.]

B2. The second one is how the things that an audience might expect or want can/might influence the news – do you think pupils have learnt any thing about that?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of audience expectations – perhaps those that arose in productions]

B3. The third one is how what can be included in the news may be influenced by what is thought to be socially or politically acceptable – do you think pupils have learnt any thing about that?
Lifeblood of democracy? Learning about broadcast news

If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of the kind of things that may be thought unacceptable – perhaps that cropped up in pupils’ work – and the grounds on which they might be thought unacceptable – and by whom]

B4. Do you think the pupils have learnt any thing about what the BBC believes in, what the BBC thinks is important – what its values are?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of BBC beliefs values]

B5. Do you think that any of the pupils’ writing and reading skills, or their speaking and listening skills have improved as a result of doing this project?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of skill areas improved]

B6. Do you think that pupils learnt any of the skills a journalist needs through doing this project?

[If time, probe for value-added in learning and examples of journalistic skill areas improved]

B7. Do you think that pupils learnt any thing from this project that linked to any other lessons they’ve had about the media?

[If time, probe for what other aspects of pupils’ media learning at school the project linked to]

B8. Do you think the project has made any difference to how pupils feel about school in general – has it made any of them more positive about the school? Has it made any less keen on school? Or has it made no difference?

[If time, probe for what aspects of project are thought to have influenced attitudes]

B9. Do you think that doing this project has made pupils more aware of politics and made it more likely that if they were over 18 they would vote in an election?

[If time, probe for what aspects of project are thought to have influenced political awareness and attitudes]

C. Impacts on self

[MAX TIME: 4 MINS]

C1. Do you think that you’ve learnt any thing through doing this project?

[Make sure they know that ‘project’ means all the work they have done on it, e.g. both here and at college. Encourage just yes, no, not sure at this stage. If no or not sure/ don’t know, go to Question C5.]

C2. [If YES to C1] what do you think you’ve learnt or got out of it?

[If appropriate] Probe once: can you tell me any more about that learning?
C3. [If YES to C1] can you think of any thing else you’ve learnt or got out of the project?

   [If appropriate] Probe once: can you tell me any more about that learning?

   [Keep asking C3 until they can’t offer any more learning outcomes. Keep a rough list of each learning outcome mentioned.]

C4. [Taking each learning outcome mentioned in turn] can you tell me which part or parts of the project helped you to get/ or learn ........... out of the project?

C5. [If NO to C1] why do you think that you have not/ are not sure that you have learnt any thing through the project?

   Probe their reasons for reporting a lack of learning.

D. Teaching on the project

[MAX TIME: 19 MINS]

D1. Could I just ask you to confirm again for me what the project consisted of (i.e. in terms of the number and sequencing of sessions) and briefly what did each of these sessions focus on?

   [Go through all the days, afternoons and sessions: e.g. first day at college, second day in Feb, three afternoons at school, 22 March day, any follow-up sessions. Establish:
   
   - How many sessions?
   - When? Over what period? Before, during and after the day?
   - Length of sessions?
   - Venues of sessions?
   - Main focus of the sessions
   - Who taught them?

D2. Did the pupils complete a finished production? Was it presented, disseminated or broadcast in any way?

   Probe on nature of finished product, who finished it, mode and timing of presentation

D3. Did you decide what to do and cover in the sessions or did someone else?

D4. What was your main source of ideas for material and topics to teach?

D5. Please could you describe the contribution or role of the following and, if possible, say how useful they were …?

   - Role and value of BBC website
   - Any other textbooks, resources or websites used
   - Role and value of BBC mentor
• BBC journalists
• any other BBC personnel
• partners/staff from other institutions (e.g. college teachers or CLC staff)
• other teachers at this school
• Any new equipment or specialist resources
• technical support staff

[For all of these keep the interviewee focused on describing their contributions and appraising their usefulness]

D6. Were planning meetings held with other partners? How effective were these?

D7. Would you recommend the department getting involved in similar projects again?

Please could you give your reasons for saying that – we are especially interested in hearing how you might try to improve similar projects in the future.

Probe perceptions of particularly successful and unsuccessful features.

That’s all of my questions for now. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much indeed.