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Making Sense of Media - Evaluate: an update on our approach

Making **sense** **o**f media

Evaluate

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Overview

Making Sense of Media ("MSOM") is Ofcom's programme of work to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. In December 2021, we published our Approach to Online Media Literacy, detailing our priorities across five pillars of work (engage, initiate, establish, evaluate, and research).

This document provides an update on the evaluate pillar of the MSOM programme. It presents our updated thinking on the structure and content of our online digital toolkit due to be launched this autumn, and an overview of our research on the barriers and challenges to evaluation in the media literacy sector.

Our toolkit will consist of guidance for the evaluation of media literacy initiatives, and a searchable evidence library.

Our evaluation guidance will focus on the three key stages of conducting an evaluation: designing; applying; and learning and sharing.

- Design: the steps involved with designing a specific evaluation. We propose to publish our 'design' section as an interactive training module embedded within the toolkit.

- Apply: the collection and analysis of data as set out in the evaluation design.

- Learn and share: the use of evaluation outputs to inform iterations of the project, future projects, and/or other projects.

Our toolkit will also include a searchable media literacy evidence and research library which will give practitioners insight into what works and doesn't work for media literacy initiatives, alongside relevant media literacy research from Ofcom and others. We have commissioned researchers to review evidence from across the sector, engage with practitioners, and produce evidence summaries for the library.

Our work since December has been informed by research we recently commissioned into the challenges and barriers to evaluation in the online media literacy sector. A summary of the findings is included at Annex 1.

The research underlined several common barriers and challenges to conducting an evaluation in the sector. These include a lack of funding to recruit evaluation expertise, or structural barriers created by the funding landscape; difficulties measuring or defining media literacy outcomes; low levels of post-initiative participant engagement; a lack of motivating factors; and sector-specific challenges such as the pace of change in the sector, or the typical delivery methods of media literacy initiatives.

Alongside our toolkit, we intend to build on this research and conduct further work to identify options for Ofcom to provide additional support to promote evaluation in the media literacy sector.

We welcome views and opinions on our plans set out in this update and invite comments to MSOM@ofcom.org.uk. We will provide further updates on our activity in due course.

Background

The Making Sense of Media programme

MSOM is Ofcom's programme of work that aims to improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children – online media literacy.

The ambition of the MSOM programme is to promote people's ability to participate effectively and stay safe online. In December 2021 we published our approach to online media literacy which outlined the steps we are taking to promote and influence media literacy in the UK.

These steps include engaging with a wide range of media literacy practitioners, initiating pilot trails and campaigns to promote online media literacy for underserved groups and communities, establishing best practice by design principles for media literacy on online platforms, promoting effective and widespread evaluation, and continuing to build on our substantial body of research into the UK's media habits, attitudes and critical understanding.[1]

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is the process of assessing the design, delivery, and outcomes of an initiative to identify opportunities for improvement, understand the impact the initiative has had on initiative participants, and/or understand the cost effectiveness of the initiative for its intended purposes.

What are the benefits of evaluation?

Evaluation can be a powerful tool for helping media literacy practitioners to understand what works, and why. As such, it adds value to initiatives, rather than obstacles.

Used effectively, evaluation allows practitioners to understand their initiatives, iterate their current and future initiatives to maximise their impact, and contribute to a common understanding of what is and is not effective in a range of scenarios. In other words, evaluation is about a process of continual engagement and refinement, to enable initiatives to evolve and improve.

Evaluation in the media literacy sector

Evaluation in the media literacy sector is uneven. While some, often larger, initiatives conduct rigorous, independent, or longitudinal evaluations, the majority of evaluation undertaken by the sector tends to be less comprehensive, focusing on a smaller range of methods which limits the evaluation's ability to holistically describe the impact that the initiative has had on participants.

A review conducted on behalf of DCMS in 2021 highlighted an overall lack of evaluation across a wide range of media literacy initiatives. The review also noted that when evaluations are conducted,

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[1] Ofcom Media Literacy Research, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/publications.

they often do not comply with best practice guidelines.[2] For example, the review identified only 20 initiatives where evaluations had been conducted – a small proportion of the overall number of media literacy initiatives identified. Of these 20 evaluations, only one was deemed to have met the criteria for a robust evaluation as set out in the HMT Magenta Book. This may be a reflection of the challenges to conducting evaluation in the media literacy sector.[3]

The DCMS online media literacy strategy identifies the "lack of sound evaluation data about which media literacy initiatives are effective" as one of its six key cross-sector challenges which represent barriers to improving media literacy rates in the UK.[4]

We commissioned qualitative research in early 2022 to investigate further the barriers and challenges to conducting evaluations in the media literacy sector. Our researchers conducted a series of interviews with practitioners and funders across the sector.

We found a similar lack of detailed impact evaluation. Instead, respondents highlighted a current focus on a more limited range of methods such as:

- **self-reporting** – short surveys which are often handed out pre and post workshops;

- **positive quotes and case studies**; and

- **reach data** – hits on webpages, downloads, estimations of shares, attendees at workshops.

While on their own these methods are unlikely to provide a comprehensive understanding of impact, they nonetheless inform practitioners about aspects of the initiative, and can form part of a more detailed and multi-dimensional package of evaluation methods.

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[2] Media Literacy Mapping Exercise and Literature Review - Phase 2 Report DCMS, 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1010027/2021-02-25_DCMS_Media_Literacy_Phase_2_Final_Report_ACCESSIBLE_v2.pdf.
[3] The UK Treasury's guide to conducting evaluations for UK policy makers.
[4] Online Media Literacy Strategy, DCMS, 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1004233/DCMS_Media_Literacy_Report_Roll_Out_Accessible_PDF.pdf.

Challenges and barriers to evaluation in the media literacy sector

Our research found a number of common barriers and challenges to conducting evaluations in the sector.

1) **Funding:** a lack of funding to recruit staff to focus on evaluation was found to be a common barrier to evaluation, as were more structural funding issues such as a lack of synchronisation between funding cycles for initiatives and evaluations. The competitive nature of funding can also impede evaluation, prompting practitioners not to share their findings, or to report only positive results. Funders can encourage evaluation activity through making it a requirement of the initiative. However, our findings suggest that funders often seek to understand factors such as initiative reach rather than gain an assessment of the impact the initiative had on those it reached.

2) **Frameworks and definitions:** difficulties measuring what good media literacy is, or understanding 'what impact looks like' were identified as barriers to evaluation. While some frameworks for measuring media literacy outcomes do exist, these were often considered to be complex, and difficult for practitioners to apply in practice.

3) **Participant engagement:** it can be difficult to contact participants after an initiative has been completed. As a result, evaluations in the sector often suffer from low response rates and engagement. Participants with low digital literacy, English as a second language, or those with busy professional lives can be challenging to engage with after the initiative has finished.

4) **Motivation:** a lack of motivation for further evaluation may also exist in the sector. While the benefits of evaluation are often acknowledged and recognised, a lack of formal requirements to evaluate projects from sponsors or funders can result in a lack of motivation to take on the additional costs and effort of conducting an evaluation – with a perception that effort is better applied looking forwards to the next project, than backwards at completed or ongoing projects.

5) **Nature of the sector:** much media literacy delivery takes the form of online resources which can be difficult to evaluate. Other projects deliver one-off introductory sessions, the impact of which is difficult to isolate given the number of other variables that could influence a person's online behaviour and literacy.

6) **Pace of change in the sector**: longer-running initiatives frequently need to adapt to shifting technologies and their consequent media literacy challenges, which can make it challenging to carry out more sustained and consistent evaluation.

Further details about our findings can be found in Annex 1. This research will help guide our approach and strategy in this area going forwards.

Update on our approach to evaluation

Our aims and objectives

Based on our research and stakeholder feedback to-date, our aim is for evaluation to be an integral yet practical part of online media literacy initiatives, with the evidence and lessons learned shared with others in an accessible way to facilitate the design of other initiatives.

This has the potential to promote media literacy in the UK by helping practitioners to develop more effective initiatives in the future, maximising the benefits the sector as a whole can bring to UK adults and children by encouraging the production and use of high-quality evidence that can both help existing initiatives to improve, and encourage the development of new initiatives.

To guide and inform our thinking we have identified four objectives for our work on evaluation. These are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Objective	
Objective 1	To promote the use of effective evaluation across the breath of the media literacy sector as a means of building and maintaining a credible knowledge base about the impact of media literacy.
Objective 2	To promote the accessibility of lessons learnt and evaluation outputs across the media literacy sector and foster a culture of openness and sharing wherever possible.
Objective 3	To promote a culture where evaluation data and insights are used to develop more effective media literacy initiatives.
Objective 4	To develop of a range of practical tools for evaluation across the sector which target the full breadth of evaluation challenges and different organisations operating in the sector.

Our activities in the sector

In our December 2021 approach to online media literacy document, we outlined four activities under our evaluate spoke:

- developing guidance on the evaluation of online media literacy initiatives and interventions;

- building an evidence base about 'what works' to improve media literacy online;

- developing a digital toolkit to share our evaluation guidance and evidence base; and

- collaborating with stakeholders to inform the development of our work.

We have since progressed our work across all of these areas. We have:

- taken on board feedback from stakeholders to refine our approach and set out clear objectives for our programme of work (set out in the table above);

- developed our initial thinking on guidance for the media literacy sector – which we set out below in this document;

- progressed the design and build of a new online digital toolkit website, building on the feedback received from volunteers from our MSOM Network who reviewed the initial prototype earlier this year;

- commissioned research into the outcomes of a range of media literacy initiatives as a means of building a database of evidence about 'what works' for online media literacy initiatives and interventions – building on the Rapid Evidence Assessment that we previously commissioned on media literacy and online disinformation;[5] and

- considered how to revise and bolster membership of our Evaluation Working Group which has helped shape our thinking and the direction of our work to support evaluation across the sector.

The online digital toolkit

In December we outlined our intention to publish an online digital toolkit for media literacy in 2022.

It is our intention that the toolkit will be an effective and inclusive tool for providing practitioners with a range of resources to support the evaluation of their initiatives and develop more effective initiatives. We want the toolkit to:

- be a valuable resource for those looking to design and deliver effective media literacy initiatives;

- support and empower practitioners to evaluate their initiatives in a cost-effective way;

- contribute to a sense of community and joint purpose in the sector; and

- make available evidence and research which can support practitioners to develop more effective initiatives in the future.

The toolkit will act as an online resource for practitioners and will bring together our interactive guidance for evaluation and our searchable library of media literacy evidence and research.

To be successful the toolkit will need to be widely adopted. We will ensure that we engage regularly with practitioners, refine our content in response to user feedback, ensure our content is up to date with latest trends and guidance from the evaluation sector, and actively promote the use of the toolkit across the media literacy sector. The toolkit will also rely on a willingness for practitioners to

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[5] Rapid Evidence Assessment commissioned by Ofcom, London School of Economics, 2021, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/220403/rea-online-misinformation.pdf

share their findings of both what worked - and what didn't work - and engage with the evaluation process.

To enable the toolkit to become an active, ongoing resource for the sector, we plan to include a blog function. The purpose of this blog is to provide thought-provoking discussion about evaluation in the media literacy sector, provide real-world examples of evaluation undertaken by others in the sector, and inform practitioners about developments in the sector. Contributions will be encouraged from across the sector and curated by Ofcom.

Evaluation Guidance

The toolkit will provide practitioners with guidance on how to design, conduct and use an evaluation of their media literacy initiative.

Structure

We have developed our evaluation guidance in three sections. These represent the key stages of conducting an evaluation: designing, applying, and learning and sharing.

- **Design**: the steps involved with designing an evaluation based on the specific initiative.

- **Apply**: the collection and analysis of data as set out in the evaluation design.

- **Learn and share**: the use of evaluation outputs to inform iterations of the project, future projects, and/or other projects.

Design

We are proposing to publish our 'design' section as an interactive module embedded within the toolkit. This module will take practitioners through the steps of planning and designing an evaluation for their initiative.

Effective planning and design of an evaluation is one of the most important steps in doing an evaluation and getting this right can determine the value that the evaluation ultimately has.

Through the module, practitioners will learn to develop an understanding of why they are doing an evaluation, what they are trying to evaluate, what questions they want to answer, and how they are going to answer those questions. The training module will take practitioners through the end-to-end planning and design process, tackling a number of concepts such as Theory of Change, evaluation questions, and evaluation indicators. A summary of the content proposed for the learning module can be found in Annex 2.

We want to ensure that our guidance has value for a range of practitioners, regardless of their experience with evaluation. Initial feedback has suggested that simplified guidance can be too basic for those who already have some experience of evaluation concepts, while more complex guidance can be off-putting for those with limited previous experience – in some cases leading to rejection of evaluation altogether. As such, we will give toolkit users the option to choose the level at which they want to work through the module. We intend to produce two versions of the 'design' training

module – one for practitioners with limited previous experience of evaluation, and one for those with more experience.

Finding a baseline (the "counterfactual problem")

To understand the impact of an initiative, it is important to understand the baseline outcomes (sometimes referred to as the counterfactual) of an initiative's participants – for example their existing level of knowledge about a topic. Without understanding the baseline, it can be difficult to measure the extent of change that the initiative has effected.

The establishment of some sort of baseline is desirable, and it is possible to do this using a range of methods. However, as our challenges and barriers research noted, the nature of the sector means that multiple variables may affect a participant's media literacy, in addition to the specific initiative or resources under review. Therefore, while we provide examples of methods and ways to measure a baseline, we acknowledge that this may not be possible for some types of initiative.

Apply

We will provide reference materials for several evaluation methods and techniques such as surveying, conducting interviews, and doing quantitative analysis. These materials may help practitioners to understand the benefits, risks, and process of using these techniques and methods in their evaluation – but will not be part of the learning module. This is because the materials outlined under the 'apply' section of the guidance are wide-reaching and practitioners may choose to use several of the techniques based on the design of their evaluation. In contrast, practitioners designing an evaluation will, for the most part, follow the same design steps for every evaluation design, so a standardised module can be developed.

Learn and share

Finally, our 'learn and share' section will provide guidance and recommendations about what to do with an evaluation. The fundamental point and purpose of an evaluation is to learn from it, in order to improve. Sharing examples of what has, and hasn't, worked is an important aspect of this. We want to encourage practitioners to consider sharing their evaluation by uploading it to our searchable evidence and research library.

Further resources

We are in discussions with organisations across the UK who can provide additional support for media literacy evaluators, to help them understand how to evaluate their initiatives. We aim to signpost these organisations, and their services, on the toolkit to ensure that further support is available to those who need it.

Searchable evidence and research library

As our challenges and barriers research underlines, there is appetite from practitioners to learn from each other, and to be able to draw upon the latest evidence and research across the sector.

Yet evaluation evidence is often not shared, and details about initiatives can be unpublished or fragmented. Additionally, evidence is often lost when website domains are closed following the conclusion of a project. As such, access to evidence and research can be a barrier to the development of effective media literacy initiatives.

To help mitigate this, our toolkit will include a searchable media literacy evidence and research library which will give practitioners insight into what works and doesn't work for media literacy initiatives. This library will comprise general information about a range of initiatives, evidence of evaluations where they exist, and general media literacy research.

Evidence will be tagged and themed, allowing practitioners to use filters to identify all of the evidence relevant to their initiative. Examples of potential filters include date, target audience, initiative type, and delivery model.

In addition to evidence from previous initiatives, we will also include reports of standalone research projects in the searchable library.[6] This will allow practitioners to get a wider range of evidence and information about a particular topic from the same library.

We are in the process of collecting evidence and research to upload to the library ahead of the formal launch of the toolkit this autumn. We have commissioned researchers to review evidence from across the sector, engage with practitioners, and produce evidence summaries for the library.[7] Our researchers have identified a number of media literacy and other behaviour change initiatives, and will conduct interviews with a number of these initiatives to produce digestible summaries for the library.

Our aim is for the library to be live and remain current, containing the latest insights from across the sector. As such, we intend to provide an option for practitioners to upload their own evidence, or research projects via an upload function on the toolkit.

Ofcom will take a role in ensuring that information uploaded to the library includes appropriate detail for toolkit users to interpret and understand the initiative, evaluation, or research, and will review information before it is uploaded. However, we will not formally endorse the evidence or research contained in the library. Practitioners who upload evidence and research will be required to provide specific details about the methodology used for research or evaluation. These details will help those using the library to make their own judgements about the quality of the evidence or research. Quality Assurance guidance for both research and evaluation will also be available alongside the library.

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[6] Research will include both third party research collated by Ofcom, and Ofcom's own research.
[7] Our researchers for this work are Emma Goodman and Kieren Aris.

Next steps

We will carefully consider feedback to the themes raised in this document when developing both our current and future programmes of work.

We are keen to get views from a wide range of stakeholders on the proposals set out in this document over this summer and ahead of the launch of our toolkit. We have arranged a series of MSOM events in each of the UK Nations in June – Manchester, Cardiff, Belfast, and Edinburgh – and we will be pleased to discuss our evaluation plans informally at these times. If you are interested in attending, please contact MSOM@ofcom.org.uk.

We welcome opportunities to discuss our proposals in more detail, including the proposed content of our toolkit. We also welcome contributions to our evidence and research library. Please get in touch with us if you would like to arrange a meeting.

We maintain a network of media literacy stakeholders from across the UK. If you would like to join the Network, please go to https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/network.

In parallel to the publication of our toolkit in the autumn and its ongoing maintenance and development, we will be carrying out further work to develop additional support to promote evaluation in the media literacy sector – tackling the challenges identified by our recent research. We will be engaging further with members of our MSOM Network and other interested parties to develop our thinking about further interventions that Ofcom could take to promote evaluation in the sector.

Our Evaluation Working Group will help us in this activity, as we expand its membership and clarify its focus.

Given the centrality of evaluation to our MSOM programme, we will assess our own activities accordingly, examining the extent to which we are achieving our aims.

In summary, our focus over the next six months will be on delivering on the commitments to deliver an online digital toolkit that we set out in December, further refinement of the processes which support our work, and developing a strategy for additional support we could provide to the sector. Specifically, we will:

1. continue to develop our online digital toolkit with a view to publishing this in the autumn,

2. continue to source material for our evidence and research library through proactive research and engagement with the sector this summer,

3. assess our own activities and examine the extent to which we are achieving or have achieved our aims,

4. expand and clarify the purpose of our Evaluation Working Group, and

5. engage further with members of our MSOM Network and other interested parties to develop our plans about further interventions that Ofcom could take to promote evaluation in the sector.

A1. Challenges and barriers to evaluation in the media literacy sector: a summary

> **About this annex**
>
> In 2022 we commissioned researchers to investigate the challenges and barriers to evaluation in the media literacy sector. This annex summarises the findings of their report.[8]

The findings outlined here are based on a thematic analysis of responses given by 18 UK-based media literacy initiatives (22 individual participants) during semi-structured interviews carried out in March and April 2022. While this is a relatively small sample, participant organisations represented an illustrative cross-section of what is a diverse and fragmented sector, ranging widely in scale, delivery method and area of focus. Taken together, these testimonies represent an informative insight into the sector's perceptions of evaluation and the challenges faced in conducting it.

Given the variety of viewpoints, what follows is a synthesis of themes and common issues. The report offers insight into what might usefully be done by Ofcom and others to help address those challenges.

Evaluation: current work

Interviewees described a broad range of evaluation activity, from an initiative using a theory of change to track attitudinal changes, through to measuring unique users to a website. For the purposes of this study these activities have been grouped into five categories: so-called "happy sheets" (self-reporting short surveys handed out pre and post workshops); positive quotes and case studies; reach (hits on webpages, downloads, estimations of shares, attendees at workshops); external evaluation, which employs a variety of methods including the above and is distinguished by the involvement of a third-party evaluator; and theory of change activity.

Participants felt that much of the evaluation work currently undertaken (with the most common method being pre- and post-session self-reported surveys) is limited in its rigour and struggles to capture behaviour change or skills acquisition. Participants were also aware that, for the most part, the longitudinal impact of their work is not captured by current evaluation. Many expressed a desire in principle to do or commission more evaluation work.

Barriers to evaluation

When asked about barriers to evaluation, a number of factors were cited, grouped into the following categories:

- Funding

- Perceived absence of definitions and frameworks

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[8] Our researchers for this work were Kate Morris and Frances Yeoman

- Participant engagement

- Pace of change

- Motivation

- Nature of the sector

Funding

Lack of funding was by far the most common perceived barrier to evaluation. Interviewees felt there were a number of ways in which funding makes an impact upon the sector's ability to carry out evaluations. These included a lack of ring-fenced budget specifically for evaluation of projects. There was an element of frustration from some participants at a perceived disconnect between calls for the sector to do better on evaluation, and the funding available to deliver such work. Without enough money explicitly ring-fenced for robust evaluation, and particularly where funders did not stipulate specific evaluation approaches beyond capture of reach, some interviewees felt that their initiatives simply lack the capacity or drive to carry it out. In this context, funders' attitudes to evaluation was central to the kind of evaluation work was being done.

However, greater availability of funding for individual evaluations would not on its own address wider financial challenges within the sector that are also felt to be impacting on the evaluation landscape. Short-term funding cycles make it difficult to conduct and report on longitudinal evaluation within stipulated spending timeframes. The grant-funded model of many organisations, in the view of some participants, creates competition for funding and thus restricts sharing of evaluation data, collaborative evaluation work and learning about best practice. This funding landscape could also, in the view of some, create a potential disbenefit to robust impact evaluation.

Perceived absence of definitions and frameworks

Participants indicated that evaluation efforts were hampered by a lack of clarity around what might be described as a realistic 'operational' definition of media literacy - i.e. what would success look like? – and by a lack of standardised frameworks for evaluation in the sector. This is in part a product of the breadth of the sector, which now encompasses 'online harms', digital exclusion and critical media literacy under the single umbrella of media literacy. Some participants expressed a desire for clearer metrics by which they could evaluate themselves within this broad definition. Two frameworks that do exist, Education for a Connected World and the Essential Digital Skills Framework were rarely cited. [9]

Participant engagement

A number of interviewees described issues connected to participant engagement, including high attrition rates among survey samples, low digital literacy or challenges with digital access. Initiatives undertaken in schools appeared to have particularly acute challenges with engagement in evaluation

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[9] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-a-connected-world and
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework for further details.

efforts. Here, factors that have added to this challenge include teacher workload, school IT policies and limited computer provision that mean children can't get online to complete post-workshop surveys, and the switch to remote delivery during the pandemic.

Some interviewees expressed concerns that if they increased the amount of evaluation they wanted their participants to engage with, this might create a barrier to entry that could deter them from engaging with the project. Others cited the nature of their target audiences – for example people who are digitally excluded or have low digital literacy – as factors making evaluation more difficult or expensive.

Pace of change, motivation, and nature of the sector

Another barrier to effective evaluation was the pace of change in the sector. Some interviewees described how initiatives frequently need to adapt to shifting technologies and the consequent media literacy challenges. They must also respond to changing definitions and policy priorities, and to a funding landscape that privileges new ideas and initiatives. This militates, in the view of some, against more sustained evaluation efforts. For example, if you are repeatedly redesigning your resources or bidding for new pots of money on an annual cycle, it is difficult to do work measuring the sustained impact of a given resource.

This point connects to two final, inter-linked barriers: motivation, and the nature of the sector. On the first, there was a widespread (if not universal) desire among the sample to conduct more evaluation work. Most interviewees recognised the value of rigorous evaluation and expressed commitment to scrutinising and improving their delivery. Some also indicated that they would like to see more evaluation work across the sector in order to establish some greater 'quality control' among providers.

However, this desire in principle to do more evaluation comes up against the practical challenges faced by time-poor staff operating with tight and often short-term budgets. The 'in principle' motivation to evaluate more, in this context, is often not sufficient to overcome the practical hurdles. Some participants spoke of the need for a stronger motivation to evaluate, and particularly to engage in collective evaluation efforts as a sector. This might be, as one put it, the drive to build an evidence base demonstrating the efficacy of media literacy interventions which in turn might bring more funding into the sector and give the issue greater policy visibility.

Finally, some participants spoke about issues relating to the nature of the sector itself as barriers to evaluation. Much media literacy delivery takes the form of online resources which some participants described as difficult to evaluate. Other projects deliver one-off introductory sessions, the impact of which is difficult to isolate given the number of other variables that could influence a person's online behaviours and literacy. Here again, competition for funding, a lack of collaboration on evaluation and limited sharing of data were cited.

Ofcom's role and the future

There was a sense of optimism from interviewees for the future, in particular regarding the role Ofcom could play in helping them overcome these barriers.

While evaluation has not been a strategic priority for many initiatives to date, there was a consensus that bringing the sector together could in part offer some solutions.

Many of those interviewed indicated they would welcome Ofcom taking a convening but also a leadership role in this space, with a spread of views as to how far Ofcom should go in terms of imposing an evaluative framework on the sector. [10]

For some, the regulator should evaluate evaluations, offering a kitemark to those that met the grade. Others said they would welcome a "suggested" framework, or range of frameworks to cater for differing evaluation capacities within the sector but cautioned against making these mandatory. As one respondent noted, "I don't want to saddle the sector with a difficult, expensive compliance regime".

There was a wide if not universal appetite for resources to help with evaluation. Participants suggested materials including clear and concise metrics of success against which they could measure; templates for various evaluation methods; examples of surveys used by other organisations, annotated bibliographies, research briefs and examples of theories of change.

Some interviewees spoke of being time-poor and felt that any online resources should be tightly curated, regularly updated and clearly structured, to avoid adding sifting and selecting to their existing workloads. There was also a desire for realism, in terms of expectations, from Ofcom linked to the extent of any evaluation they might be able to do, and the form it should take.

Finally, there were calls for Ofcom to be a motivating force around evaluation as well as a provider of practical support. As one interviewee said of the sector, "someone needs to own it" and there was a sense from several participants that Ofcom should assume that role.

The two funders interviewed felt that Ofcom had a wider role to play, although had differing views about the nature of this role. One expressed willingness to work to an Ofcom framework for evaluation, saying: "I would love Ofcom to give a framework that all of these organisations should work to … I guess when we are working with a partner commissioning something, we would then say, "do you use the Ofcom evaluation?"

Another indicated they would be open to guidance as to how their funding could be spent helping evaluative efforts in the sector. "If there was a sort of centralised memory system to help us look at what's been evaluated [and] what's still needed in the landscape, and where we can make meaningful interventions with future investments, that would be very helpful, but I don't think we necessarily need the guidance on how to evaluate in a super-prescriptive way."
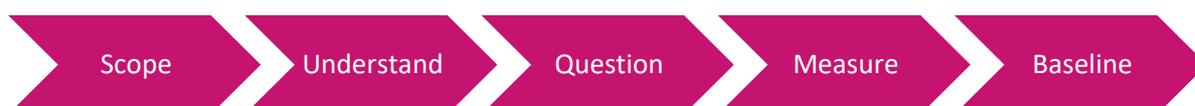
Several of those interviewed were open to Ofcom taking a leadership role on evaluation and indicated an appetite for community events to share best practice.

One interviewee said: "What's the reason for all of this [work on evaluation]? All the people in this space … obviously see a value in being [here] … and care. And Ofcom … need to pitch that [sense of community for the greater good]."

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[10] Interviewees were told that the project was for Ofcom, and that they could speak anonymously.

A2. An overview of our 'design' online learning module

We have developed a five-step method for designing an evaluation. These steps are designed to take practitioners through the process of designing an evaluation. The module will be set out in two initial versions – one for those with little or no experience of conducting evaluations, and one for those with more experience.

| Scope | Understand | Question | Measure | Baseline |

Stage	Why are we including this stage?	What are the main learning outcomes and recommendations?
Scope	It is important that practitioners understand why they are doing an evaluation and what they want to get out of their evaluation, as this will inform the evaluation design, and ensure that the evaluation outputs are aligned with the needs of the initiative and its stakeholders.	This section will take learners through the process of working with stakeholders to understand the purpose of the evaluation, different types of evaluation and their purposes, and the prioritisation criteria for undertaking an evaluation.
Understand	Evaluations are about understanding if the theory behind an initiative actually worked. It is therefore important that practitioners have a good understanding of how they think their initiative will work in practice.	This section will take learners through the process of developing a Theory of Change – specifically a results chain. We will outline the main steps to completing a results chain, establish how this can be used to support the evaluation and the initiative design, and emphasise the importance of working with project stakeholders to develop the results chain.
Question	An evaluation should have a clear evaluation question or questions. Practitioners should use their Theory of Change to identify the questions they want to answer. Evaluation questions focus the evaluation to	We will set out the process of developing good evaluation questions. We recommend the use of a bottom-up generation, and top-down prioritisation model for establishing 2-3 questions for the evaluation.

Stage	Why are we including this stage?	What are the main learning outcomes and recommendations?
	ensure the evaluation is addressing the most important issues.	
Measure	Setting out a clear plan outlining what is going to be measured, what data is available, and how it will be collected is critical for the success of an evaluation.	This section will outline recommended steps for establishing what needs to be measured to answer the evaluation questions set out in the previous section (such as setting indicators), and the data that can be collected to measure this.
Baseline	To understand the impact of a programme we need to be able to assess the outcomes for initiative participants with and without the initiative treatment. Without understanding the baseline, it can be difficult to attribute an impact observed to the initiative with confidence.	This section will outline theory behind the 'counterfactual problem', the importance of finding a reliable baseline, and set out some established strategies for finding a reliable counterfactual.