

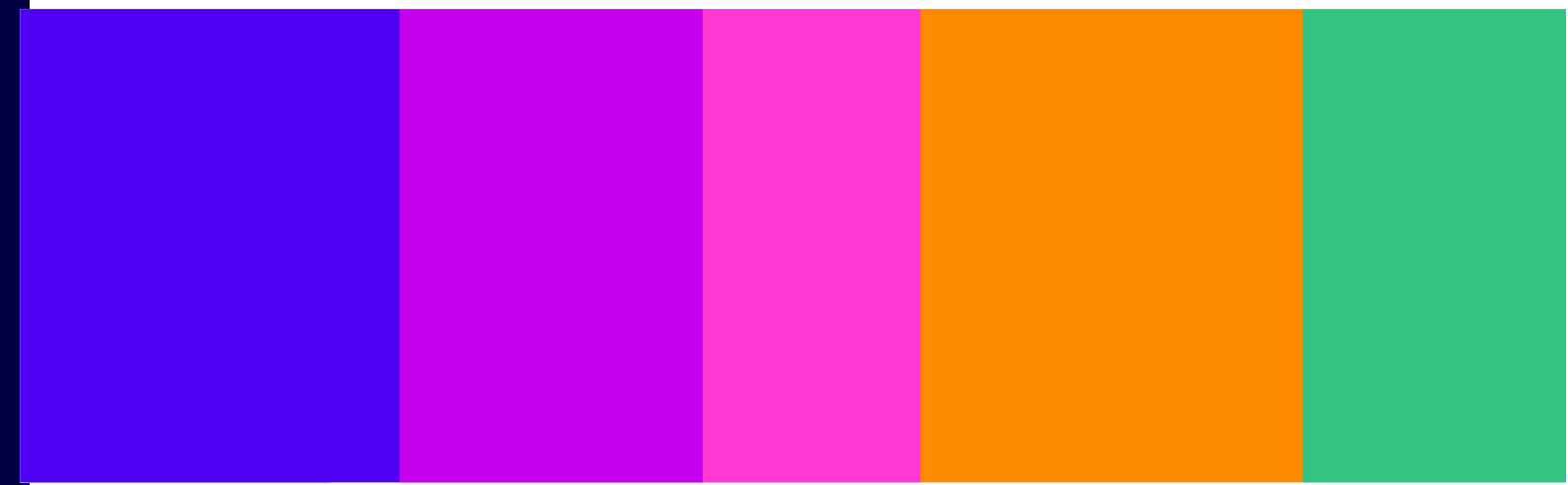
# How to promote Media Literacy

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Media Literacy Recommendations for online, broadcast and other content-related services

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# 1. Executive Summary

- 1.0 Media literacy is everyone's business. A media literate population with the skills to critically assess the content they see, and with the skills and tools to shape their own media experiences, is better able to participate in civic life and in today's workforce. This is a shared benefit for the UK.
- 1.1 No one organisation can bring about this change in skills and behaviours amongst the UK population at scale. Online, broadcast, and other content-related service providers have the potential to support the population's media literacy and are uniquely well-placed to tailor their offer to best meet the needs of their users and audiences. Many service providers already recognise that they have a role to play in ensuring that their users and audiences are safe and empowered to make positive choices when engaging with content. Others have more to do.
- 1.2 Under the Communications Act 2003, updated by the Online Safety Act 2023, Ofcom has a statutory duty to set out media literacy recommendations explaining how online services and others can promote media literacy. This document sets out what we expect from service providers in scope of our Media Literacy Recommendations (also referred to in this document as 'the recommendations').
- 1.3 There are ten Media Literacy Recommendations. Recommendations 1 to 6 cover recommendations to '*design for better user choice*' and '*empower people during use*' and are for online and other content related services. Recommendations 7 to 10 cover recommendations to '*build trust beyond the content platform and service*' and '*evaluate what works*' and are relevant to all services in scope.
- 1.4 We expect these recommendations to be adopted by services that create and distribute, or enable the creation, hosting and distribution of, content through broadcast, on-demand and online services, including social media and streaming services.
- 1.5 Taken together, these recommendations can help create content and media environments that will actively empower users and support critical engagement. These are statutory, but non-binding, recommendations. As a result, there is an opportunity for service providers to work with us to trial, innovate, and iterate their approach as they learn what works to deliver better media literacy outcomes across the UK population.
- 1.6 We will review and revise the recommendations in 2029. In advance of that, we will report on how online services and broadcasters have adopted the recommendations. These recommendations are designed to enhance the media literacy of the UK population and in our report will consider how service providers have responded to and adopted these recommendations as well as the impact these changes have had.

## 2. Scope of Recommendations

- 2.0 The recommendations are aimed at a broad range of service providers that create and distribute, or enable the creation, hosting and distribution, of content through broadcast, on-demand and online services, including social media and streaming services.
- 2.1 Examples of service providers we expect to adopt the recommendations include:
- a) Online services: user-to-user services (such as social media, video sharing platforms (VSPs), forums, messaging apps, and online games) and search services;
  - b) Broadcasting and streaming service providers such as public service broadcasters (PSBs) and other broadcasters, including their video on demand (VoD) services, subscription video on demand (SVoD) and ad-supported video on demand (AVoD), free, ad-supported streaming television (FAST) channels, and streaming/online services, including online TV, radio, and audio platforms;
  - c) Generative AI services, such as chatbots, artificial intelligence (AI) character apps, and audio, image, and video generators, as well as other kinds of generative AI content creation services. These services are reshaping the digital landscape by automating content creation, personalising distribution and enabling more interactive and immersive experiences. These services are well placed to embed media literacy practices early as the technology continues to develop;<sup>1</sup> and
  - d) Other content-focused services that aggregate, distribute, and publish content across a mix of websites, apps, TV, and online services to reach audiences. Examples include online intermediaries and online TV platforms. Ongoing shifts in viewing habits and business models towards these and other emerging services, along with those anticipated in the coming years, highlight the growing need for consistent media literacy support, regardless of where or how people access media.
- 2.2 In this document, ‘online services’ refers to user-to-user and search services. ‘Online and other content related services’ refers to both user-to-user, search, and wider services including generative AI and other content-focused services, but not broadcasters. When referring to ‘all service providers’, this captures the broadest range of services in scope - online, broadcast, and other content-related services.
- 2.3 Some recommendations are more appropriate for different types of organisations. Recommendations 1 to 6 only apply to online and other content related services (not broadcasters), and 7 to 10 are applicable to all service providers, including broadcasters.
- 2.4 The recommendations are non-binding, and we have not set a defined scope for their application. The examples in paragraph 2.2 provide clarity on who we expect to adopt the recommendations.

# 3. The Media Literacy Recommendations

## Introduction

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- 3.0 The recommendations have been grouped into four categories, designed to broadly map onto typical user journeys through digital environments:
- **Design:** recommendations focused on how online and other content related service providers can design their services to offer people informed choice and meaningful control from the outset.
  - **During use:** recommendations aimed at empowering people while they are actively engaging with content and features.
  - **Beyond the service:** recommendations that encourage all service providers to contribute to media literacy more broadly, including through partnerships and outreach.
  - **Evaluating what works:** recommendations that promote the assessment of media literacy initiatives and the continuous improvement of people’s experiences through each of the three steps above (i.e. via design, during use, and beyond the service).
- 3.1 For each of the ten recommendations, we explain the purpose of the recommendation and set out the supporting evidence base. Each recommendation addresses a specific issue, with an explanation of why further action from service providers is warranted. We also present the evidence base that underpins both the challenges identified and the examples of good practice we encourage service providers to adopt.

## Design

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- 3.2 The recommendations in this section are focused on how service providers can design their offering to give people informed choice and meaningful control from the outset. They are only applicable to online and other content related services. We recommend that providers of generative AI services adopt these recommendations early, as they are well-positioned to embed media literacy practices from the outset, especially as these technologies evolve and gain wider public adoption.
- 3.3 Ofcom’s [Best Practice Principles for Media Literacy by Design \(BPP\)](#) April 2024 set out what constitutes best practice for the promotion of media literacy on online services, particularly in relation to how online services are designed. The BPP apply across a range of online service types including search, social media, gaming, and video-sharing services. We recognise that some online services have already pledged to adopt the BPP and have said that they are actively implementing media literacy by design. We encourage all online services to adopt these principles as a way of supporting media literacy for their users.

## Recommendation 1: Embed media literacy by design, making inclusive and accessible design choices a foundational principle in service architecture and policy

- 3.4 The way that services are designed plays a critical role in shaping user behaviour and building long-term trust.<sup>2</sup> When people understand how a service operates, especially how their data is used and the choices they are offered, they are better able to engage meaningfully and responsibly.<sup>3</sup> Inclusive and accessible design choices are central to media literacy by design because they ensure that those with diverse needs can access services and be empowered to engage with them. This includes children, people with disabilities, and those with lower digital confidence.<sup>45</sup>
- 3.5 Media literacy by design becomes even more critical when children are likely to use a service. Children interact with services differently from adults and often lack the cognitive maturity to navigate complex privacy settings or persuasive design features.<sup>6</sup> Nor should they be expected to do so. Our research into online services shows that many do not treat child accounts differently from adult accounts at sign-up, missing critical opportunities to implement age-appropriate safety and privacy protections.<sup>7</sup>
- 3.6 **We therefore recommend that service providers adopt and publish a ‘media literacy by design’ policy and practice.** This should be a living document that evolves in response to user needs and technological changes. **We also recommend that, where children are likely to use the service, service providers prioritise age-appropriate design that emphasises simplicity, safety, and clarity in both content and data practices.**<sup>8</sup> This includes key considerations such as default privacy settings, simplified language, and clear explanations of features tailored to younger audiences and other vulnerable groups.<sup>9</sup> The age and development stages set out in *Volume 2 of the ‘Protecting children from harms online’ statement* identify the following groupings: ages 0-5 as pre-literate and early literacy; ages 6-9 as core primary school years; ages 10-12 as transition years; ages 13-15 as early teens; and ages 16-17 as approaching adulthood.<sup>10</sup> Service providers must also consider their obligations under other relevant legislation. More detail on this can be found in the Q&A section.

## Recommendation 2: Offer clear, meaningful choices and transparent information at key points in the service experience

- 3.7 There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that the way online services design their content and present choices to people shapes how they respond.<sup>11</sup> Literature demonstrates that users are particularly open to adjusting their settings at key moments in the user journey, such as at sign-up.<sup>12</sup> In order for people to be able to take control of their online experiences and the content they consume, they need to be provided with clear information about the content they are seeing at those key moments.
- 3.8 Our research has shown that defaults are widely used by services.<sup>13</sup> Defaults increase the likelihood of selection when an option is pre-set and people may unknowingly agree to settings that affect their privacy, data sharing, or content visibility, without fully understanding the consequences.<sup>14</sup> These default choices may prioritise online services’ interests over people’s choices and control, making it harder for individuals to make informed decisions about how their information is used or how content is curated for them. Our research also highlights that people tend to stick with their initial choices at sign-up to a service, making this a vital moment to promote empowered choice.<sup>15</sup>

- 3.9 Many service providers use content recommender systems. Content recommender systems are used to create personalised content feeds on services. However, it remains unclear how well people who use these services understand how these systems operate, or whether they feel they have a choice over the content they see.
- 3.10 This lack of clarity can lead to people feeling disempowered or manipulated, particularly if they are unaware of how their data and behaviour are being used to shape their online experience. It can also contribute to the spread of misinformation, reinforce filter bubbles or limit exposure to diverse perspectives.<sup>16</sup> Without clear explanations, people are less able to critically engage with the content they see, which undermines informed decision-making and media literacy.
- 3.11 Our research shows that online service design can sometimes hinder media literacy, particularly when there is a lack of transparency around how results are ranked or how recommender systems operate.<sup>17</sup> While the recommender systems each service uses may vary, service providers could aid people in understanding what their specific systems do and how they can influence what they see. This includes providing clear, accessible explanations and highlighting the options people have available to influence and curate their personalised content.
- 3.12 **We recommend that service providers clearly inform people at key moments in the user journey, such as during sign-up or profile creation, about the use of content recommender systems and how content is recommended to them.** This should include clear explanations of what these systems do to help them understand their choices and support informed decision-making. This could be done through, for example, their terms of service, by providing clear onboarding information, through consent and transparency, prompts/reminders, or accessible help and settings sections of the service. Service providers must also consider their obligations under other relevant legislation, as this builds on top of expectations to ensure that recommender systems are not pushing harmful content to children.<sup>18</sup> Further, should future legislative developments introduce additional restrictions or limitations on the use of recommender systems, such provisions take precedence over the recommendations set out in this publication.
- 3.13 **We recommend that service providers use the detail in Figure 2 to help users better understand why they are seeing certain content in their feeds and make informed choices.**

**Figure 2: Further transparency recommendations**

<p><b>Provide clear, accessible explanations of how recommender systems work</b></p>	<p><b>Offer real time transparency tools that provide contextual information at the point of interaction</b></p>	<p><b>Provide service-led algorithmic literacy resources</b></p>	<p><b>Collaborate with independent experts to ensure high-quality, impartial literacy support</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use plain-language, user-facing explanations that avoid technical jargon.</li> <li>• Incorporate visual or interactive explainers showing how different signals (e.g. engagement, follows, watch time) influence recommendations.</li> <li>• Offer a tiered or “layered” information structure, with simple explanations upfront and more detailed information for those who want it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include “why am I seeing this?” prompts with concise, meaningful explanations.</li> <li>• Show which past behaviours or interactions contributed to the recommendation.</li> <li>• Distinguish clearly between recommended content and content that appears due to follows, subscriptions or network connections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer clear informational materials explaining how recommender feeds work, the potential risks they may pose, and how users can effectively navigate and use the tools available to them.</li> <li>• Provide age-appropriate versions of these resources for different user groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage behavioural scientists, media literacy specialists and other experts to strengthen the accuracy, relevance, and effectiveness of informational interventions.</li> </ul>

### Suggested further reading on design

- Regulated services under the OSA should consider risks to users with vulnerabilities, including those with disabilities, when conducting their risk assessments. We expect providers to take into account their risk assessment findings when considering as part of these recommendations how to present information for such users on their service. See Ofcom’s [Illegal Content Risk Assessment Guidance](#) and [Children’s Risk Assessment Guidance](#).
- Ofcom’s [Exploring the relationship between persuasive design on online platforms, and the time that children spend on them](#) is a qualitative research report which provides more information about which features are influencing time spent on online platforms, and to explore how these interact with different types of content.
- The ICO [transparency guidance](#) and [data protection by design and default guidance](#).
- The [ICO’s children’s code](#) sets out how online services should appropriately safeguard children’s personal data. It should be followed to ensure children’s data is processed fairly and that the best interests of the child are considered in all aspects of service design, including measures to protect and support children’s development, health, and wellbeing.

## During Use

- 3.14 The recommendations in this section are aimed at empowering people during their active engagement with content and features. Adoption of these recommendations will help ensure that people are equipped with the knowledge, skills, tools, confidence and support they need to manage their content and media consumption, as well as online interactions effectively.
- 3.15 We recommend that service providers support users so that:
- People are equipped with practical tools to manage and personalise their online experiences;
  - People are empowered with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to understand, interpret and critically assess the credibility of the content they encounter;
  - Parents and caregivers are empowered and supported to guide and protect younger users in age-appropriate and meaningful ways; and
  - Expert third parties are empowered, engaged, funded, and enabled to provide enhanced support, helping to extend the reach and impact of media literacy efforts.

## Recommendation 3: Equip people with practical tools to manage and personalise their online experiences

- 3.16 Content management tools are one category of resource available to help people shape their experiences on services. Other tools include screen time prompts, features that flag the tone of comments or question the accuracy of information, and emerging technologies that indicate when content has been generated by AI.

- 3.17 Collectively, these tools can play a meaningful role in enhancing users' media literacy. For example, time management tools can help users' navigate services that are designed to maximise engagement which keeps people online longer than they intend.<sup>19</sup> Ofcom research shows that features such as autoplay, infinite scroll, and personalised content feeds can lead people to spend more time online than they desire, which can leave people, and in particular children, feeling disempowered when using services.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, social media use even among children as young as 3- to 5-years old has seen a significant increase – driven by a variety of services – up from 29% (2024) to 37% (2025).<sup>21 22</sup>
- 3.18 Behavioural research by Ofcom has found that default settings can be "sticky" meaning that, even when prompted, few people move away from the default content control settings.<sup>23</sup>
- 3.19 **As people are unlikely to adjust their settings, we recommend that service providers provide simple, accessible tools that equip people to manage their experiences during use.**

## **Recommendation 4: Empower people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to understand, interpret, and critically assess the credibility of the content they encounter**

- 3.20 While many tools already exist to help people manage their online experiences, take-up remains low.<sup>24</sup> Without the relevant knowledge, skills, and confidence, people will not be empowered to use them and these tools risk becoming redundant.
- 3.21 [Ofcom's behavioural audit](#) systematically assessed how design features across six popular services, including one VSP, influenced user behaviour, focusing on sign-up processes, time management tools, negative sentiment tools, and reporting mechanisms. It found that the majority of online services audited offer tools to manage the content users see in their feeds, such as hide, block, or report, but that these are often difficult to locate or unintuitive to use. Tools such as blocking and reporting are essential for user safety, but poor design can undermine their effectiveness. These tools frequently require multiple steps to implement, which can discourage use by creating friction.<sup>25</sup> In addition, poorly designed or unclear systems, such as vague user sanction policies or confusing blocking options, can leave users uncertain about how to protect themselves.
- 3.22 **We recommend that service providers actively support users in deploying the tools they have developed with the necessary skills and confidence.** This includes not only making tools more intuitive and accessible but also raising awareness of their existence and providing clear guidance on how to use them effectively. Service providers can do this by reducing the steps to access tools and by using simple language and visual prompts to build user confidence. We expect services to further engage and consult with groups who are less likely to use their tools to understand how to provide appropriate support.
- 3.23 Generative AI is increasingly used to create content that is shared and distributed online. In 2025 Ofcom published *Deepfake Defences 2: The Attribution Toolkit*, which highlighted that technologies such as watermarking and metadata can help users identify and interpret synthetic media more accurately.<sup>26</sup> **We recommend that service providers provide meaningful context about content and its sources, using tools such as watermarking, metadata and AI labels, to support informed interpretation and build trust.** Service providers should implement several of these tools, rather than relying on just one, and

should continue to invest in research and standardisation to improve how context around content is provided.

- 3.24 In addition, we encourage service providers to adopt tamper-resistant interoperable approaches for attaching secure provenance information to digital content. These methods can involve embedding metadata that records key details about how content was created, edited and distributed, and processes to help detect data tampering (such as digital signatures and online verification tools). They should help users distinguish authentic material from manipulated or synthetic media and provide accessible cues that support critical media literacy. Ensuring that this provenance information remains intact when content is shared across services will further support user understanding and trust.
- 3.25 We recognise that some service providers may have limited access to certain forms of context (e.g. metadata). They should nonetheless strive to offer meaningful information wherever possible to aid user understanding.
- 3.26 We expect generative AI tools, such as chatbots, to implement these recommendations across their services, especially the recommendations regarding providing meaningful context to users about content and its sources. Providing visible citations to reliable sources in response to user prompts will help to create a more trusted information ecosystem. Ultimately, it is vital that services support people in developing the critical thinking skills needed to navigate the products they provide. How they empower their users and audiences will be a matter for them and will necessarily include a combination of design, tools, placement, and investment in skills development. When done well, this not only empowers individuals but also contributes to a more resilient, informed, and safer digital environment.

## **Recommendation 5: Empower and support parents and caregivers to guide and support younger users in age-appropriate and meaningful ways**

- 3.27 The responsibility of keeping children safe online must fall on the platforms themselves. However, parents and caregivers should be empowered so that they can also help children and young people to learn how to navigate and manage their online experience. All families are different and will approach their experiences on services in diverse ways. While family tools can help to manage these experiences, many parents and caregivers are concerned about their children's screen time and online behaviours. Research into services shows that parents often feel underprepared or unsupported in managing these challenges.<sup>27</sup>
- 3.28 Our research into online services shows that 93% of parents are aware of tools to support children online, yet only 76% of parents of 3–17-year-olds use at least one.<sup>28</sup> This gap highlights that awareness alone is not enough. Factors such as design, usability, and online confidence significantly influence uptake.<sup>29</sup> Our research also shows that built-in parental controls, such as those embedded on devices, are the most commonly used, suggesting that ease of access and seamless integration are key.<sup>30</sup> Tools that are difficult to find, configure, or understand may discourage use, even among well-informed parents.
- 3.29 Our research into online experiences also reveals a reactive pattern: the number of parents setting up filters or controls increases after a child encounters harmful content (from 23% to 34%).<sup>31</sup> This suggests that proactive education and design nudges targeted at parents

and caregivers could encourage earlier adoption, which may help to prevent children's encounters with harmful content in the first instance.

- 3.30 **In alignment with the *Illegal Content Codes of Practice* that apply to online services, we recommend that service providers set strong safety defaults for child accounts, and in line with the *ICO's Children's Code*, we recommend strong privacy settings for child accounts.<sup>32 33 34 35</sup> In addition, and as a complement to other measures to protect children, we recommend clearly presenting parental controls at sign-up and other opportune moments, helping families make informed, safe choices from the outset.** Service providers should ensure that these tools are effective and that parents understand how they can best be used.<sup>36</sup>
- 3.31 Children are also increasingly exposed to the commercial features of the services they use. For example, in-app or in-game purchases can enhance their online experience, which is something many children value and actively seek out. However, without appropriate knowledge and support, children may be vulnerable to financial harms, even in situations where parents or caregivers are comfortable with them accessing paid-for features. This is understandable, as children often lack the financial literacy or life experience to fully grasp the consequences of their spending decisions.
- 3.32 Our research has shown that some children, especially older teenagers, acknowledge that the excitement lies more in the thrill of the purchase than in the product itself. Parents and some of the oldest children expressed concern that this behaviour could become a gateway to gambling, as young people chase the "purchase high," which encourages continued engagement and spending. The cycle of buying and seeking the next thrill creates an environment where impulsive behaviour and risk-taking are reinforced.<sup>37</sup>
- 3.33 Service providers have a role in helping children and young people to develop their understanding surrounding online monetisation and how this shapes the digital environment. This will help them become more informed and empowered users of technology. **We recommend that service providers ensure transparency around commercial features and costs, with real-time notifications and easy-to-use settings that keep parents and caregivers informed and in control.**
- 3.34 The tools we have been discussing are particularly relevant for parents and caregivers with younger children. However, as children grow older their digital habits evolve, and while these tools can still play an important role, there is also a growing need for open and ongoing conversations about online life. These discussions can be challenging, as many parents and caregivers feel underprepared. The diversity of parental controls and safety features across services adds complexity – what works well on one service may not translate to another, requiring a high level of digital literacy and confidence that not all families may possess.
- 3.35 **We recommend that service providers engage with and support, through funding and collaboration, expert third parties that can provide tailored guidance to parents and caregivers, both in person and online.**

## Recommendation 6: Empower, engage, and enable expert third parties to provide enhanced support, helping to extend the reach and impact of media literacy efforts

- 3.36 Expert third parties play a critical role in supporting the media literacy of the population. They bring a range of strengths and expertise to media literacy: some have deep, on-the-ground knowledge of user needs and community vulnerabilities and are trusted by their audiences, while others offer expertise in specific aspects of media literacy, such as educational or professional support. Some are uniquely positioned as expert voices in online safety, health or parenting young adults, and some provide in-person services that build confidence and engagement.<sup>38</sup> Their diverse capabilities make them essential partners in reaching and supporting a wide range of people.
- 3.37 Online services have a powerful role to play in connecting people with the information they need, especially during emergencies or meaningful moments in the user journey. For example, services can guide users toward expert third-party resources and authoritative content in ways that make sense for their users. This could include integrating context-aware triggers and time-sensitive interventions, such as when users search for or report harmful content, as well as using onboarding flows or help centre materials.<sup>39</sup> Our experience shows that partnerships with organisations that already have expert relationships with target groups are key to effective engagement and response.<sup>40</sup> This approach not only supports immediate information needs, but also strengthens users' media literacy by helping them identify credible sources and navigate complex situations with confidence.
- 3.38 **We recommend online and other content related services explore ways to share timely links to expert third party sources and authoritative content during meaningful moments.** This helps people access reliable support and respond confidently.

### Suggested further reading for during use

- Ofcom's [Protection of Children Code of Practice](#) for user-to-user services recommends that a provider should make publicly available materials which explain how to block, mute, prevent users commenting on content, and how to accept or decline a group chat invite to parents or guardians of children. This should further act to inform parents how to make safe choices.
- Ofcom's [A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls](#) guidance for tech companies on how to tackle online gender-based harms sets out clear steps that providers can take to improve user control, user support, and reporting tools that account for the dynamics and complexities of online gender-based harms.
- Ofcom's [Era of Answer Engines](#) discussion paper provides a number of recommendations to help improve the user experience when using these GenAI tools, including using content filtering systems and secondary AI models to remove harmful materials from search responses before users encounter them, embedding safety for models at the point they are trained and introducing 'read-before-sharing' nudges directly into the user experience.

- Ofcom’s [Why all of us need to talk about mis and dis information](#) provides some of the key findings from our research about mis and disinformation, exploring the ways to navigate and mitigate its impact.

## Beyond the service

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- 3.39 **The recommendations in this section are aimed at all service providers in scope, including broadcasters.** They are focused on encouraging service providers to contribute to media literacy more broadly, including through partnerships and outreach beyond their own service.

### **Recommendation 7: Help people understand, interpret, and assess the credibility of information by creating and/or promoting relevant programming or educational content**

- 3.40 Service providers can reach large audiences through a range of interventions, including educational initiatives, online resources, and programming that supports critical engagement with content. With their wide reach, they are well-placed to support parents, caregivers, and third-party organisations to promote media literacy.
- 3.41 In 2025 Ofcom published [Transmission Critical: The future of Public Service Media](#). In it, we said that PSBs need to invest in media literacy in the UK and called on them to build on existing work.<sup>41</sup> We said that PSBs’ distinctive and trusted relationship with audiences is a key asset in helping people build confidence in navigating digital environments. In *Transmission Critical*, we also said that PSBs and large commercial broadcasters could have a role to play in supporting users to understand how to use tools to curate their content feeds, and we included examples of media literacy activity from PSBs and Sky.<sup>42</sup> These examples included educational initiatives such as workshops for young people, online resources such as quizzes and interactive content and the integration of topical themes into a wide range of programming, from magazine shows to dramas and soap operas.<sup>43</sup> We said that there may be opportunities for PSBs to collaborate more closely to scale up delivery and impact in relation to media literacy.<sup>44</sup> Given its remit to support learning for people of all ages, we said that the BBC has a particular responsibility. In late 2025 the Government published its Green Paper on the BBC Charter which set out potential media literacy duties for the broadcaster.<sup>45</sup> Further, the [Government recently published its Watch this Space: A new strategic direction for UK media Green Paper on the future of TV distribution](#).<sup>46</sup>
- 3.42 In *Transmission Critical*, we called on PSBs and VSPs to work together to help audiences more easily see and find this content, and we are exploring what steps could support this. Some service providers are already taking steps to surface authoritative content in line with this ask. **We recommend that service providers create and/or promote programming or educational content that helps people to understand, interpret, and assess the credibility of information** through a wide variety of approaches on online services and digital environments in culturally inclusive ways. These would in turn support parents and caregivers in making informed decisions about their child’s online experiences and help prepare children for a digital future.

## Recommendation 8: Promote media literacy beyond services, investing in campaigns, content, and partnerships that promote media literacy skills

- 3.43 Developing media literacy skills is not innate – it requires time, support, and investment. A media literate population is more likely to engage in civic activities and is more likely to have the skills required to contribute to economic growth.<sup>47</sup> However, funding for community-based media literacy skills development programmes is often hard to find, short-term, and can be led by brand requirements rather than community needs.
- 3.44 By supporting media literacy programmes, service providers can engage with communities through those who have trusted relationships, often where change can most effectively be achieved. We encourage all services to build strategic, scalable partnerships with charities, educators, and other bodies to help share the responsibilities and amplify the impact of online services and others' effort.
- 3.45 We will explore developing a set of Best Practice Principles for services that support organisations delivering media literacy activities in the community. These will be co-produced with community organisations and may cover areas such as outcomes, funding models, and programme design.
- 3.46 *The House of Lords Media Literacy Inquiry* highlighted the role of technology companies in advancing media literacy across the UK, recommending that they invest in the development of people's media literacy skills.<sup>48</sup> This aligns with one of the goals of our three-year strategy to encourage online services to actively promote, support, and fund media literacy initiatives. **We recommend that service providers actively support media literacy skills development by committing to long term sustainable funding of skills-building programmes.**
- 3.47 Our learning about 'what works' in media literacy skills development suggests that this is best delivered by organisations with trusted relationships with their communities. By 'trusted partnerships,' we mean work that is most often local, specific, targeted, and impactful.<sup>49</sup> We also recognise that both online and offline communities can play valuable roles in developing media literacy skills. We expect this recommendation to be adopted in a proportionate way to the scale and reach of each service provider.

## Recommendation 9: Support the media literacy of underserved and diverse audiences

- 3.48 Media literacy must be inclusive. It should not only focus on those who are already able to engage with services, but also seek to reach those who, for various reasons, are currently unable to participate in media literacy initiatives. This inclusivity should be embedded from the design stage, through user engagement, and into broader societal outreach.
- 3.49 At the design stage, supporting the media literacy of underserved and diverse audiences means recognising that every design decision can affect users differently. Online, broadcast, and streaming services should therefore aim to meet a wide range of needs by involving diverse users in the research and development process, ensuring that services are both accessible and relevant. Ensuring accessibility for users with disabilities should be a key consideration.
- 3.50 Service providers should also consider how to support the media literacy of diverse audiences when they are using their services. This means recognising that factors, such as

age, online skills, confidence, socio-economic status, and accessibility needs, all influence how information is received and understood, and that different user groups may be affected differently by certain types of content.<sup>50</sup>

- 3.51 **We recommend that service providers adopt inclusive design practices that address a broad spectrum of media literacy needs, especially for those most at risk.** This includes using plain language, visual cues, and conducting user testing with under-represented groups to ensure that information is clear, accessible, and meaningful.<sup>51 52</sup>
- 3.52 Beyond the core offering, service providers must consider how underserved or marginalised communities might need support to access and engage meaningfully. Barriers to access can arise from factors such as socioeconomic status, age, sex, disability, and other intersecting characteristics.<sup>53 54</sup> Our experience is that media literacy initiatives that are informed by peoples lived experiences, cultures, and contexts are more likely to be effective and inclusive. We recognise that this work can be complex and resource-intensive and that some traditional broadcasters and community radio services already work to reach underserved and marginalised communities. We encourage them to continue with these initiatives and report on them.
- 3.53 **Given those complexities, we also recommend that service providers who don't have local community knowledge form partnerships with third sector organisations and grassroots community groups, and particularly third sector organisations that have strong connections to underserved communities, to co-design and deliver impactful, scaled media literacy interventions.**

#### Suggested further reading on beyond the service

- Ofcom, 2025, [A teachable moment: opportunities, gaps and next steps from our review of media literacy training for teachers](#)
- Ofcom, 2024, [What works in delivering media literacy activities](#)

## Evaluating what works

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- 3.54 The recommendations in this section are focused on promoting the assessment of media literacy initiatives and the continuous improvement of people's experiences through recommendations 1 to 9 i.e. via design, during use, and beyond the service.

### Recommendation 10: Conduct and publish evaluations of the impacts of their choices and activities

- 3.55 Evaluation plays an important role in understanding the impact that design choices and interventions have on people's knowledge, skills, and behaviours. It is vital that service providers evaluate the impact of their media literacy activities. Evaluating design choices enables them to understand what works, what does not, and where improvements are needed.
- 3.56 Evaluation approaches should be relevant and proportionate. For example, while larger online services may be able to use advanced methods such as A/B testing or randomised control trials (RCTs), smaller service providers can focus on simpler methods to assess the benefits of interventions for their target audiences.

- 3.57 Reporting and sharing findings helps build a clearer picture of the scale and nature of media literacy activity across the UK. We recognise that some service providers embed media literacy by design or deliver targeted interventions. However, these efforts are often part of broader initiatives and may not be reported as media literacy work. Capturing and reporting on these activities reduces duplication, sets benchmarks for others and highlights existing commitments in terms of measures and resourcing. This, in turn, helps identify where further action is needed. If findings are published, they can also contribute to a wider body of knowledge on the impact of media literacy.
- 3.58 **We recommend that service providers regularly assess the impact of their design choices and media literacy activities and publish their findings.**
- 3.59 **We also recommend that service providers publish an annual statement on their media literacy activities, including:**<sup>55</sup>
- Media literacy by design choices that offer people meaningful choice and control from the outset;
  - Any programmatic content which supports the promotion of media literacy outcomes, as defined by [Ofcom's media literacy outcomes bank](#);
  - Delivery of scaled media literacy interventions to their target audiences, including details of the number of people reached, funding metrics, and where they were delivered; and
  - Collaboration and support for organisations that are trusted by underserved audiences, including their funding contributions.
- 3.60 By embracing the challenge of reporting on media literacy activities, the largest service providers can lead by example and build a stronger evidence base for what works. As with all evaluation, approaches should be relevant and proportionate.
- 3.61 We will review and revise the recommendations in 2029. In advance of that, we will report on how online services and broadcasters have adopted the recommendations which may reference the annual statements made by services adopting the recommendations.

## 4. Questions and Answers (Q&A)

### Can I choose to take on only some of the recommendations?

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How the Media Literacy Recommendations are implemented by service providers will vary depending on the type of service; the size of the service; and the areas of highest risk or priority. Recommendations 1 to 6 are directed at online and other content related services, whereas Recommendations 7 to 10 are directed at all services in scope. We will review and revise the recommendations, including who they should apply to, in 2029.

Ofcom is required to produce Media Literacy Recommendations by the Communications Act 2003 (amended by the Online Safety Act 2023) and as such they are statutory recommendations. The Communications Act 2003 does not empower Ofcom to enforce the recommendations and so they are non-binding. Should we find that the non-binding nature of these recommendations prohibits progress towards Government's intended policy outcomes in introducing the relevant amendments to the Communications Act 2003 through the Online Safety Act 2023, we will consider this as part of the review process.

We've provided further advice about how recommendations can be adopted by services of different sizes below. For any further questions, we encourage service providers to get in touch.

### I'm a smaller service provider — what does this mean for me?

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We recognise that services vary significantly in size, reach, operating model, and resources. The recommendations are intended to be proportionate. This approach is intended to promote media literacy without placing undue burdens on smaller service providers.

For example, in adopting Recommendations 1 and 2, especially for online services:

- All online and other content-related service providers are expected to embed media literacy by design to support better user choice.
- For smaller service providers, this may mean taking practical, low burden steps such as using clear and accessible language at sign-up, avoiding unnecessarily complex default settings, providing straightforward explanations of how content is organised, and ensuring that key tools and settings are easy to find and use.
- We expect larger service providers, those with greater reach, or posing greater risk, to go further and adopt a more systematic and documented approach to media literacy by design. This could include aligning their service architecture and governance processes with [Ofcom's Best Practice Principles For Media Literacy](#). Service providers that pledged to adopt our principles in October 2024 submitted examples of how they were already implementing media literacy by design on their services, and areas they would like to focus on in the future. The examples submitted provided a benchmark against which future progress can be kept under review, and represented a public commitment to ongoing, accountable action.

Providers can adopt best practice when it comes to both their general approach to media literacy and platform design, as well as the development of specific products, interventions, and supports for users. For example, in adopting Recommendations 7 to 9, for online, broadcast, and other content-related services:

- For larger service providers, we would expect a more significant role to be played, particularly where these recommendations involve content creation, partnerships, or sustained financial investment. Larger broadcasting, streaming, or online services may be better placed to create or commission educational content (Recommendation 7), invest in long-term media literacy initiatives and partnerships (Recommendation 8), or support targeted work with underserved audiences at scale (Recommendation 9).
- For smaller service providers a proportionate contribution may mean amplifying existing high-quality content or ensuring their own services are inclusive and accessible to diverse users.

## Is there a timeline for implementation?

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The recommendations will be in place from publication. Because the recommendations are non-binding, there is an opportunity for service providers to work with Ofcom to trial, innovate, and iterate as they adopt them to best meet the needs of their audiences and users.

We will review and, as needed, revise the recommendations, completing this process for the first time in 2029. In advance of that, we will report on how online services and broadcasters have adopted the recommendations.

## What is meant by media literacy by design?

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When we refer to media literacy by design, we mean both the service providers' approach to media literacy and platform design, as well as the development of specific products, interventions, and supports for users and audiences.

The recommendations encourage service providers to embed media literacy by design to support better user choice. Recommendations 1 to 4 focus on media literacy by design, which are only applicable to online and other content-related services, not broadcasters.

## Who do you mean by expert third parties?

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In this context, organisations and individuals who bring a range of expertise to media literacy are expert third parties. Some have deep, on-the-ground knowledge of user needs and challenges faced by some communities, while others offer expertise in specific aspects of media literacy such as educational or professional support. Some expert third parties are uniquely positioned as expert voices in online safety, health, or parenting, and some provide in-person services that build confidence and engagement.

These organisations and individuals include but are not limited to user-advocacy groups; digital inclusion organisations; family-focused charities; those working on information integrity; grassroots initiatives; education and health professionals; educational programme providers; media and communications researchers; and academics.

## Is there any support available for monitoring and evaluation?

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We encourage service providers to work with us on their monitoring and evaluation, to collaborate, innovate and iterate their media literacy work.

For service providers assessing the impact of design choices (media literacy by design), please refer to our [Best Practice Design Principles for Media Literacy](#) which also includes guidance on monitoring and evaluation.

For service providers assessing the impact of media literacy interventions such as educational programmes and campaigns, we have published an [Outcomes Bank](#) and an [Evaluation Toolkit](#).

For public service broadcasters, our [Statement of Programme Policy Guidance](#) suggests how they could report on media literacy in their annual reports. Service providers working in partnership with other organisations on media literacy can signpost them to these resources. Evaluation should be robust and proportionate.

## What other support is available in adopting the recommendations?

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This *'How to promote media literacy'* publication outlines the recommendations and is accompanied by a [Statement](#) explaining how we designed the recommendations. There is also a 'Suggested further reading' list at the end of most sections of this document to further support service providers.

If service providers have any further questions related to the Media Literacy Recommendations, we encourage them to [get in touch](#) with Ofcom.

## How do the Media Literacy Recommendations relate to the Online Safety Act?

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These recommendations complement and build on existing legislation and do not replace legal obligations. Service providers must still comply with all relevant laws. The Communications Act 2003 places statutory duties on Ofcom to promote media literacy, as amended by the Online Safety Act (OSA) 2023.

Among other things, Section 11(1D) of the Act requires us to draw up a statement recommending ways in which others might develop, pursue, and evaluate activities or initiatives relevant to media literacy in relation to regulated user-to-user and search services. Additionally, while section 11(1D) focuses specifically on regulated user-to-user and search services, section 11(1) of the Act (the statutory duty to promote media literacy) relates to electronic media more broadly.

Section 11(1E) requires us to publish a statement of recommendations and any revised versions in a manner that ensures that those likely to be affected are made aware of it. This Statement of Media Literacy Recommendations is that document.

The recommendations are aimed at a broader range of service providers beyond those regulated under the OSA. The recommendations do not prejudice, supersede, or replace the duties under the OSA, or any future duties or additions to the OSA. These include duties relating to protecting users from illegal content and content harmful to children, as well as the additional duties on categorised service providers that some of the regulated services under the OSA are required to meet. The additional duties on category 1 service providers which are of particular relevance to the recommendations are the user empowerment duties.<sup>56</sup> We will be consulting on these duties from July 2026 ahead of a Statement in 2027.

## How do the Media Literacy Recommendations relate to Data Protection Law?

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We recognise the complementary but distinct roles of media literacy and the data protection regime. While data protection focuses on safeguarding individual's personal data and ensuring lawful, fair, and transparent processing by service providers, media literacy aims to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills to understand how their data can shape their online experiences.

Services must comply fully with data protection legislation, including the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, and have regard to relevant guidance from the ICO.

# 5. References

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<sup>1</sup> Some generative AI services may be in scope of Part 3 of the OSA and therefore subject to the relevant duties. In November 2024, [Ofcom published an open letter to online service providers operating in the UK about how the OSA will apply to Generative AI and chatbots.](#)

<sup>2</sup> CMA, 2022, [Evidence review of Online Choice Architecture and consumer and competition harm – GOV.UK](#)

<sup>3</sup> To meet similar aims from a data protection perspective, we recommend viewing the ICO's [transparency guidance](#) and [data protection by design and default guidance](#).

<sup>4</sup> Regulated services under the Online Safety Act should consider risks to vulnerable users, including those with disabilities, when conducting their risk assessments. We would expect providers to take into account their risk assessment findings when considering how to present information for such users on their service. See Ofcom [Protecting children from harms online](#), Volume 3, Section 8 for further details.

<sup>5</sup> Services should also consider their obligations under other relevant legislation (for example, the Equality Act 2010), as well as industry standards and good practice to ensure their services meet the access needs of disabled people. See, for example, 'WCAG 2 Overview', 2005. World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), March 2024. [See Ofcom Children's Risk Assessment Guidance, Volume 3, Section 8 for further details].

<sup>6</sup> 5Rights Foundation sets out a taxonomy of the most commonly used design strategies to influence behaviour on products and services popular among children. Source: 5Rights, 2023, [Disrupted Childhood: The cost of persuasive design.](#); 5Rights Foundation, 2023, [Digital Childhood: Addressing childhood development milestones in the digital environment.](#) See more information on child behavioural stages in the Recommended age groups section (Section 7.15).

<sup>7</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Behavioural Audit of Online Services.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Article 25 of the UK GDPR requires services likely to be accessed by children to take into account children's higher data protection matters. Please see ICO, 2020, [Age-appropriate design: a code of practice for online services](#); and ICO, [Data protection by design and by default](#).

<sup>9</sup> For example: Ofcom, 2025, [Protecting children from harms online, Volume 4: What should services do to mitigate the risks of online harms to children](#), p.481. Ofcom's Protection of Children Codes of Practice recommend that certain user to user and search services provide age-appropriate user support materials for children, and ensure that their terms of service regarding the protection of children are clear and accessible.

<sup>10</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Protecting children from harms online: Volume 2 The causes and impacts of online harms to children.](#)

<sup>11</sup> CMA, 2022, [Online Choice Architecture: How digital design can harm competition and consumers.](#)

<sup>12</sup> BIT, 2014, [EAST Framework: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Behavioural Audit of Online Services.](#)

<sup>14</sup> CMA, 2022, [Online Choice Architecture: How digital design can harm competition and consumers.](#) This report provides evidence that defaults are one of the most powerful tools in online choice architecture, with a 27% increased likelihood of selection when an option is pre-set.

<sup>15</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Behavioural insights to empower social media users.](#)

<sup>16</sup> A filter bubble is a personalised digital environment created by algorithmic content curation, where users are predominantly exposed to information that aligns with their previous online behaviour, potentially limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints.

<sup>17</sup> Ofcom, 2023, [Report: Exploring high media literacy among adults and children.](#)

<sup>18</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Consultation: Online Safety - Additional Safety Measures.](#)

<sup>19</sup> While streamers and PSBs do not generally monetise dwell time in the same way as ad-funded online platforms, engagement remains economically and strategically important, supporting retention, reach, advertising value (for some services), and public value delivery. As a result, many streaming and broadcast VoD services are still designed in ways that encourage prolonged engagement.

<sup>20</sup> Ofcom, 2026, [Exploring the relationship between persuasive design on online platforms, and the time that children spend on them](#)

<sup>21</sup> Ofcom, 2020, [Lockdown leads to surge in TV screen time and streaming.](#)

<sup>22</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Top trends from our latest look at the UK's media lives.](#)

<sup>23</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Behavioural insights to empower social media users.](#)

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- <sup>24</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Behavioural insights to empower social media users](#). The report shows that only 26% of people say they have ever used content controls offered by social media platforms. This research was finalised before either the Protection of Children Codes of Practice, or the Illegal content Codes of Practice came into force. The report recommends, for example, clear reporting mechanisms, and so there may be improvements since this research took place.
- <sup>25</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Behavioural Audit of Online Services](#).
- <sup>26</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Deepfake Defences: Mitigating the Harms of Deceptive Deepfakes](#).
- <sup>27</sup> Pew Research Centre, 2020, [Parenting Kids in the Age of Screens, Social Media and Digital Devices](#).
- <sup>28</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report](#).
- <sup>29</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report](#).
- <sup>30</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Children and parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report – interactive data](#).
- <sup>31</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report](#).
- <sup>32</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Illegal content Codes of Practice for user-to-user services](#).
- <sup>33</sup> This aligns with the principle of data protection by design and by default. Protective settings should be on by default to safeguard users, especially children, in line with the ICO Children’s Code (Standard 7). Defaults set to high privacy ensure the best interests of the child are protected. Services should also make positive nudges to remind children of the benefits of the default settings.
- <sup>34</sup> Report by The Insights Family produced for the ICO, 2022, [Understanding Data Protection Attitudes](#). The research found that over 40% of parents/carers ranked “provide a high level of privacy by default” as one of the most important actions platforms should take to safeguard children’s data.
- <sup>35</sup> Report by [Ofcom Behavioural Insights to engage children with content controls](#), found that ‘defaults were the strongest driver of safer content choices,’ which informed the development of the Protection of Children Codes.
- <sup>36</sup> In addition, as per the [Issued Protection of Children Code of Practice for user-to-user services](#), PCU F1.3, a provider should make publicly available materials which explain how to block, mute, prevent users commenting on content, and how to accept or decline a group chat invite to parents or guardians of children. This should further act to inform parents how to make safe choices.
- <sup>37</sup> Discovery, 2025, [Persuasive design features and potential child financial harms – qualitative research](#).
- <sup>38</sup> For example, authoritative sources like NHS or WHO which were both used in the pandemic.
- <sup>39</sup> In addition, as per the [Issued Protection of Children Code of Practice for user-to-user \(U2U\) services](#), PCU F2 recommends that certain U2U services should provide children with information when they restrict content or interactions with other accounts. Furthermore, PCU F3-F5 recommend that certain U2U services signpost children to support when they report, post/repost or search for harmful content.
- <sup>40</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Listening to experts: mental health and media literacy](#).
- <sup>41</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Transmission Critical: The future of Public Service Media](#). p.57.
- <sup>42</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Transmission Critical: The future of Public Service Media](#). p.62.
- <sup>43</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Transmission Critical: The future of Public Service Media](#). pp.60-61.
- <sup>44</sup> Ofcom, 2025, [Transmission Critical: The future of Public Service Media](#). p.61.
- <sup>45</sup> [Britain’s Story: The Next Chapter – BBC Royal Charter Review, Green Paper and public consultation](#).
- <sup>46</sup> DCMS, 2026, Watch this Space: A new strategic direction for UK media
- <sup>47</sup> Park, 2023, [Exploring the relationship between media literacy, online interaction, and civic engagement](#).
- <sup>48</sup> House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee, 2025, . p.37, paragraph 113.
- <sup>49</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [What works in delivering media literacy activities](#).
- <sup>50</sup> Evidence suggests that neurodiverse children may be more likely to be adversely affected by content depicting violence. Ofcom, 2024, [Understanding pathways to online violent content among children](#).
- <sup>51</sup> This aligns with the position of the ICO and CMA in their joint DRCF paper on “Harmful Design in Digital Markets”, [harmful-design-in-digital-markets-ico-cma-joint-position-paper.pdf](#), where they promote fair, transparent, and user-centric digital environments.
- <sup>52</sup> Transparency is a core principle of the UK GDPR, and further guidance on how to ensure users understand how their personal data is collected, used, stored, and shared, is available on the ICO website, [Transparency | ICO](#).
- <sup>53</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Exploring high media literacy among children aged 8-12](#) and [Exploring high media literacy among adults and children](#).
- <sup>54</sup> Ofcom, 2024, [Boosting skills among children, older adults and Disabled people: Evaluating what works for media literacy](#).

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<sup>55</sup> For the licensed public service broadcasters – Channel 3 licensees, Channel Four Television Corporation ('C4C') and the Channel 5 – please refer to Ofcom's [Statement of Programme Policy Guidance](#) section 2.57.

<sup>56</sup> Category 1 services are a subset of categorised services, which include some of the most-used social media services.