

Channel 4's response to Ofcom's consultation on Media Literacy

Summary

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Ofcom's consultation setting out its recommendations for how broadcasters, streaming services and online platforms can promote media literacy. It is essential that UK audiences are empowered to confidently navigate a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

As Ofcom points out in its consultation, public service broadcasters (PSBs) have a role to play in promoting media literacy given their ability to connect with a diverse and wide range of audiences, with whom we have built strong and trusting relationships.

Channel 4 has a unique role to play

As a publicly owned yet commercially funded PSB, with a remit to represent, challenge and reinvent, Channel 4 plays a unique role within the wider public service media ecosystem. We have consistently been at the forefront of innovation. Channel 4 was the first PSB to launch a streaming service and the first to make YouTube and other social platforms a cornerstone of our strategy for reaching younger audiences, whom we have a specific duty to serve. Our *Fast Forward* strategy, is further accelerating this transition into a truly digital-first public service streamer. This spirit of innovation extends into the news space, with Channel 4 News [FactCheck](#), the first dedicated fact-checking service of its kind, encouraging and supporting greater scrutiny of news stories.

We support media literacy in a range of ways and our impact can be further enhanced

Given our major focus on delivering for audiences online, we are particularly aware of the opportunities and challenges they face in the digital space and the need for media literacy to enable audiences to engage with and benefit from online content, including public service media (PSM). In this response, we set out various ways in which Channel 4 supports media literacy through our digital news output, our research into how audiences are consuming news content, our streaming service functionalities, and our support for relevant organisations. We also set out how PSBs' role in delivering trusted, accurate and impartial news can be further strengthened through measures to extend PSB prominence to video sharing platforms.

PSBs, online platforms and the education system must all play a role

As Ofcom highlighted in their [PSM Review](#), all PSBs face significant financial pressures and growing competition for audiences from global platforms. Well-funded online platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok, have a clear opportunity to invest in media literacy initiatives and ensure that they embed media literacy into their platform design - including by ensuring prominence for trusted PSM content. We also share Ofcom's view that government has an essential role to play by ensuring the modern education system equips children and adults with the skills they need to navigate the digital world effectively.

Channel 4's support for media literacy

Provision of trusted and high-quality digital news and current affairs

As noted above, it is essential that audiences can access, understand, and engage with trustworthy, high-quality news on online platforms where misinformation and disinformation are widespread. This is especially important for younger audiences, who are less likely to consume content from traditional news providers. One of the most important ways in which Channel 4 delivers for audiences is through our trusted and high-quality news and current affairs, both on linear and across social media and video sharing platforms (VSPs).

Channel 4 News is the youngest-profiling news service among the PSBs and is continually innovating and experimenting with its digital output to better understand what drives engagement, with notable success. 2024 marked a record year of record-breaking digital growth for Channel 4 News, achieving 1.8 billion global views of our digital news content across YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook—a 49% increase year on year. TikTok was the fastest-growing platform, surpassing 1 billion total views globally, more than double the previous year. Follower numbers grew by 150%, with 67% of TikTok viewers under the age of 35. Crucially, this success was not driven by any dilution of the serious topics covered in our news output; audiences showed strong interest in subjects such as climate change, UK politics, and world news.

Our work to provide young audiences with accurate, informative and engaging journalism extends beyond our news provision. Our groundbreaking digital-first documentary strand *UNTOLD* informs, provokes and sparks vital conversation on current societal issues. Building on this, we recently announced the commission of two digital news podcasts designed to give young people access to trusted journalism in a popular and growing format. *A News Thing* and *Untangled* provide young audiences with duly impartial, fact-checked coverage of the week's biggest stories. Available on VSPs such as YouTube and Spotify, these podcasts reinforce our reputation for trusted journalism and strengthen our connection with younger audiences, ensuring reliable content cuts through in accessible and impactful formats.

Supporting PSB's to deliver trusted journalism on video sharing platforms

Despite clear progress in using online platforms to reach key audience groups with high-quality news, our content competes with a vast array of unaccountable material from around the world. VSPs prioritise content based solely on engagement rather than public service values such as quality, accuracy, or cultural relevance. This is why regulation must ensure prominence for PSB content on the largest VSPs—safeguarding the availability of trusted, impartial news and current affairs online. This is critical to helping audiences trust what they see online and, ultimately, to sustaining a functioning democracy. We welcome Ofcom's recommendation to government to consider legislation to secure such prominence.¹

Understanding changing media habits: Channel 4's Gen Z research

Channel 4 also publishes research into the media use and habits of younger audiences to promote a wider understanding of the challenges that media literacy aims to address, and to guide our own approach to reaching younger audiences. Earlier in 2025 we published the third phase of our research into young people's media habits. [Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust](#). It highlighted that this age group faces growing uncertainty in

¹ [Ofcom 'Transmission Critical: The future of Public Service Media', Pg. 5 - 6](#)

who and what to trust; struggling to reconcile issues of bias, impartiality and truth in such an information-saturated environment.

Although tech savvy, Gen Z has grown up immersed in a polarised and often misleading social media environment, in which algorithms often preference outrage over truth. Gen Z demonstrates a much 'flatter' pattern of trust in media than older generations – that is, they are as likely to trust social media posts from friends (58%) and influencers (42%) as they are to trust established providers such as the BBC (43%). As trust in shared facts erodes, societal cohesion weakens, increasing disengagement from democracy and weakening civil society. This makes media literacy even more critical - particularly in the context of changes to the national voting age, where more young people may be influenced by social media when forming democratic decisions. In this environment, the ability to access trusted information becomes even more essential.

Channel 4's research offers valuable insights for industry, regulators and government and underscores the critical responsibility of public service media organisations to lead efforts in rebuilding trust between young people and reliable sources of information. Channel 4 will continue to invest in innovative storytelling formats that meet Gen Z on the platforms they use, while maintaining the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality.

Exploring and educating on media literacy through our content

Channel 4 programming often explores themes of technology and media, encouraging audiences to think critically about digital environments—particularly for young people. For example, [Swiped: The School that Banned Smartphones](#) sparked conversations around digital safety and media literacy. These topical programmes align with Channel 4's commitment to innovate and deliver trusted information while addressing societal challenges around online behaviour.

Following *Swiped*, audience research found that 58% of viewers reflected on how much time they or their family spend on smartphones, with many considering direct action such as taking a break or a 'digital detox'. Additionally, 42% said the programme motivated them to learn more about the Online Safety Act, helping audiences navigate content and engage critically with platforms. Programming of this nature empowers viewers to make informed decisions and, in some cases, change aspects of their own lives.

Tools to support informed choices within Channel 4 Streaming

Media literacy and informed content choices are also supported via our streaming platform. Within Channel 4 Streaming, we have integrated tools that empower parents and caregivers to guide and support younger users in age-appropriate ways. This includes a PIN functionality that allows parents and carers to restrict access to certain content. In addition to parental controls, we provide clear and consistent content warnings across Channel 4 programming and streaming services, highlighting themes such as strong language, violence, or sensitive subjects. These measures are an important part of how we help audiences make informed choices about what they watch and ensure they feel confident to navigate and understand media content.

Partnering in support of media literacy

Finally, Channel 4's role in media literacy extends beyond our content. We partner with [Media Smart](#), an award-winning education initiative, so support their work to equip young people with the skills to critically evaluate advertising and digital content and inspire them to consider the sector as a career choice. Through free, age-appropriate resources and guides for 7–25-year-olds, as well as expert advice for parents and guardians, Media

Smart fosters informed decision making and transparency in online environments and reinforces Channel 4's strategy to empower audiences and strengthen digital wellbeing. Organisations like Media Smart play a vital role in helping young people to think critically about the content they encounter—questioning what is presented, promised, or sold.

Conclusion

We welcome Ofcom's consultation and strongly endorse the importance of media literacy, supporting Ofcom's objectives in a range of ways, including by providing audiences with trusted, accurate news online; through our valuable research into how young people engage with media; and by exploring themes around media literacy and online harms within our programming.

PSBs have an important role to play in promoting media literacy, given our trusted relationship with audiences, complimenting the critical role of education in equipping children and adults with the skills to navigate the digital world effectively. We acknowledge the particularly important role the BBC can play, given the scale of its digital services and the public funding it receives via the licence fee. However, the role and expectations of PSBs to support media literacy must be proportionate and consistent with the realities of long-term challenges to funding to all PSBs, and the wide range of public service obligations that we continue to deliver. In order to futureproof and enhance PSB's vital role in promoting trusted, accurate journalism, particularly to young audiences, measures to ensure PSB prominence on VSPs should be urgently implemented, alongside wider reforms to support a thriving public service media ecosystem.

There is also ample scope for global platforms to assume greater social responsibility for addressing and promoting greater public understanding of online harms, which includes ensuring their own users have the knowledge and tools they need to participate fully and safely in online media. In an era of mis and disinformation, we can only begin to address challenges of this scale if all parties including PSBs, global platforms, and the education system play their part, proportionate to their reach, responsibilities, and resources.