

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY FOR EVERY STUDENT IN EVERY SCHOOL

A briefing note for MPs, Peers and policymakers

The new UK government is committed to a broadening of the school curriculum that gives a rightful place to enriching abilities such as critical thinking and navigating the complexities of online environments. The Labour Party's pre-election mission statement on *Breaking down the barriers to opportunity* called for a curriculum review that will seek to embed digital, oracy and life skills in young people's learning. That review has now been initiated.

The Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA – www.mila.org.uk) calls on the government to implement urgent changes to the curriculum, recognising the fundamental importance of skills and competencies that truly prepares young people for their digital futures. To do this, there is a need to provide media and information literacy education for every student in every school. MILA welcomes the opportunity to talk to MPs, Peers, policymakers and researchers to develop an understanding of why media and information literacy is genuinely important to society, and in particular why it needs to form an integral part of our education system.

What Is Media and Information Literacy (MIL)? It is the ability and confidence to engage fully with media and information in our connected daily lives. MIL is a fundamental building block for a healthy, inclusive society — a society in which everyone is empowered to engage safely and critically with information, and with how information is mediated. It helps people to be discerning in the way that they use, share and create information, thereby contributing to civic engagement and democratic participation. It builds resilience to online harms, including misinformation and disinformation, and helps to develop better understanding of AI. Decades of research and practice tells us what works in MIL education. We know from this work that **MIL both protects citizens and benefits society.**

What is MILA? It is a cross-sector charity whose purpose is to promote media and information literacy in the UK. MILA works by:

- fostering projects and initiatives derived from collaborative efforts, including research to extend the evidence base;
- bringing about a joined-up approach to developing media and information literacy across sectors;
- influencing policy and practice, drawing from the credibility of pooled expertise.

MILA has worked with the UK Government, Ofcom and a wide range of organisations on media and information literacy projects. MILA is also the UK Chapter of UNESCO's [global MIL Alliance](#).

How do young people develop media and information literacy in UK schools? Currently, there is minimal media and information literacy education in schools in England (the situation differs somewhat in the other devolved nations). Many schools do not do any MIL work with young people; MIL may feature in subjects such as media studies and citizenship, but it is addressed in a fragmented way which does not give it due prominence in the curriculum. And although the International Baccalaureate assesses MIL, it is only offered in this country in a tiny number of schools. MILA calls for this to change. The research tells us that MIL is developed most effectively in young people if they can bring their everyday digital experiences into educational settings. When teachers and information professionals work together with young people, we get *joined up thinking* about how to work with the digital environment. MILA is bringing stakeholders together to join up our thinking about MIL. Now we need to secure a space for this in the school classroom. **The curriculum review and the government can make it happen.**

What is needed? In 2021, the UK government set out a national Online Media Literacy Strategy. The government and Ofcom implemented this through a series of small-scale media literacy projects, some of which have involved MILA stakeholders. Additionally, the 2023 Online Safety Act includes provisions for advancing public awareness of media literacy. MILA welcomes these developments, but there is a yawning gap, since neither the Strategy nor the Act properly address what needs to be done in schools. We need to put our efforts into **media and information literacy in every school, for every student**. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Media Literacy provided one possible way forward in its 2022 [report](#), which recommended the introduction of a Media Literacy Education Bill drive the implementation of media literacy education. Encouragingly, in an interview in August 2024, the new Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, suggested that critical thinking, and the associated ability to show discernment towards what appears online, should be embedded in taught subjects. MILA proposes that:

- The curriculum review should fully address the need properly to incorporate MIL in the curriculum, starting at primary school.
- Consequently, the Department for Education should give much more prominence to MIL in the curriculum in England, so that it is better recognised as an indispensable part of young people’s education, and in the training of new and existing teachers and school librarians, for every student in every school – as is the case in other countries, including across Europe and in the US.
- MIL should be incorporated in formal assessment of competencies and included in school inspections as a core level of competency.

Why do we call for this? Because the research tells us that:

- MIL education has been shown to lessen the vulnerability of young people to misinformation, conspiracy, radicalisation and fake content, and to help them to use AI responsibly.
- ‘Quick fix’ responses such as fact-checking tools and online resources are less effective and sustainable for MIL than longer term educational programmes. Tools and resources are like ‘giving a fish’, whilst school-based MIL education is like ‘teaching to fish’.
- MIL activities which take place out of school rarely reach the poorest children and they are the most vulnerable to misinformation and online harms – this is where the out of school focus for the Online Media Literacy Strategy is flawed.
- MIL has a positive impact on young people’s mental health and their behaviour in the digital environment. Over time, this makes the media and information ecosystem a healthier place for us all.
- When children are media and information literate and can use AI responsibly, they take this home. This creates inter-generational MIL which has clear benefits for families and for the communities which schools serve.

What will it cost? We can utilise the skills and experience of education and information professionals already working in schools teaching media studies, ICT, citizenship. They can work with teachers of other subjects, and importantly also with school librarians, to integrate MIL across the curriculum. Teacher training will be needed to renew and upskill teaching for the digital future. Of course, there are costs associated with this, for curriculum reform, incorporation into assessment and teacher training and for resources in schools. But the cost of *not* equipping young people with media and information literacy will be much greater. This is MILA’s conviction, and we call for the government to take action.

Contact MILA for more information or to get involved – www.mila.org.uk/contact/

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