

# **BBC CHARTER REVIEW AND MEDIA LITERACY**

## **A synthesis**

### **DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

#### **BACKGROUND**

On 23 February 2026, the Media & Information Literacy Alliance and Demos' Epistemic Security Network hosted an online meeting to discuss proposals included in the DCMS Green Paper to inform the BBC Charter Renewal process. The discussion was preceded by an initial presentation and Q&A with the BBC's Director of Policy & Public Affairs and the Director of Verify.

This paper is a summarised and anonymised synthesis of the discussion, setting out the broad range of views of the c.30 meeting participants. The paper is signed by some of the participants at the meeting as a record of what was covered in the discussion, but it does not endorse a particular stance or opinion on the contents of the Green Paper - individual participants will have submitted their own responses to the consultation. It is submitted to DCMS to inform deliberations about the BBC Charter Review and is also being made public.

#### **PROPOSALS**

*"The BBC should have formal, regulated duties to counter misinformation and disinformation and support media literacy in the UK, to ensure that the BBC is held to the highest standards in supporting these efforts."*

*"How can the BBC work with other organisations working in this space [i.e. countering misinformation and disinformation and supporting media literacy in the UK]?"*

#### **OPPORTUNITIES OF THE PROPOSALS**

##### ***1. The BBC makes an important contribution***

Some participants were less aware than others of the breadth of what the BBC already contributes which could be considered media literacy provision. However, the institutional role that the BBC does play to deliver a range of media literacy programming, including Bitesize and via Verify is recognised as a very valuable contribution to the media and media literacy ecosystem. It has unique reach, scale and the ability to present key messages in a variety of engaging formats, such as soap operas, documentaries etc that are difficult for other education or voluntary sector organisations to replicate.

##### ***2. There is value in emphasising the BBC's beneficial contribution to the wider media ecosystem***

It was recognised that public service media organisations typically, or at least in other countries, see their role as a contributor or a catalyst for a healthy media ecosystem. This too can also be true of the BBC and yet that role could be made more explicit in its purposes.

*3. The BBC could go even further with its provision reaching new audiences, at scale in new formats*

There is an opportunity for the BBC to help extend its media literacy programming even further to parents and other adults. These audiences can be hard to reach by the voluntary and education sector.

The fact that the BBC can use alternative and engaging formats at scale such as drama and documentary to disseminate key messages is also very valuable and should be utilised to a greater degree given the scale of the challenge of upskilling the public in this way.

*4. The BBC could platform and catalyse the impact of others in the sector*

It could be valuable for the BBC to facilitate sharing the resources of other media literacy organisations in a central resource library and enabling existing approaches that have proven impacts to be scaled even further to new audiences.

*5. The BBC can uniquely weave democratic and civic themes in its variety of formats*

Because the BBC offers a diversity of media formats, it has the opportunity to role model or inspire democratic participation and civic attitudes and behaviour through different kinds of media e.g. soap operas and dramas - particularly at key cultural or civic moments. Any such initiative would need to ensure there was a wide range of voices, clear criteria for selecting themes and transparency surrounding any partnerships.

## **RISKS OF OR REASONS TO QUESTION THE PROPOSALS**

*6. The definition of media literacy and the metrics for success being used matters to its effectiveness*

The current framing of the proposed new BBC purpose regarding duties for media literacy alongside countering misinformation and disinformation could suggest that media literacy efforts are purely designed to tackle this issue. Media literacy is much more than fact-checking or identifying mis/disinformation and indeed online safety. This narrow, protectionist definition is what has limited the effectiveness of earlier conceptions of media literacy in the school curriculum that have, in the recent Curriculum Review, been improved.

Media literacy should instead be understood as the means by which the public can develop a critical understanding of the entire evolving media and information environment. As with reforms to the National Curriculum that have also sought to increase the level of media literacy education in the curriculum, it would be important for the BBC's media literacy provision to enable the public to engage actively as citizens and creative media producers in the media and information environment, contributing to social cohesion and empowering informed democratic participation. Critical AI literacy (not just functional AI skills) should also be understood as a key component of media literacy.

To avoid the misinterpretation of the purpose of the media literacy inclusion in the BBC's purposes, it should be distinguished as a distinct purpose and not conjoined to one that focuses on countering mis and disinformation.

*7. It would be useful to indicate what outcomes could be used to assess the success of this duty*

It would be important to ensure that BBC's or other mainstream news media provider's consumption is not used as the indicator of good media literacy. Instead, it will be important to

recognise the importance and value of other good quality news providers that include independent journalists and news aggregators. Importantly, citizens should learn how to be able to evaluate and critique the whole news media ecosystem, including the BBC.

*8. There are risks in positioning the BBC's purpose as a fact-checker of misinformation and disinformation, particularly political content*

Some felt that there is a risk with the proposed duty to counter mis and disinformation that it instrumentalises the BBC as fact-checking organisation, including for content issued by political parties. If some political parties are disseminating misinformation more than others, it could risk damaging trust in the BBC's role as an impartial public service news organisation. However, others also thought there could be an opportunity for the BBC to provide a dedicated service for analysing political claims, presenting narratives across the political spectrum whilst avoiding adopting a partisan point of view.

*9. The BBC has not historically played a strong coordination or collaborative role of its own media literacy provision or indeed that of other organisations*

There is a common theme that there is a need for the BBC to coordinate better not just across its own channels and workstreams that could be considered as inter-connected media literacy provision e.g. between its educational programming, young reporters scheme and Verify, but also with other organisations and actors in the media and education ecosystem.

It is notable that there are concerns about the BBC news organisation's role and its impact on the local and independent news market. There are similar concerns about how the BBC coordinates with other media literacy organisations and the education sector on the subject of media literacy - should the BBC play a more active role as a media literacy provider, then it will be important for the BBC to do a thorough market assessment to ensure it can be a catalyst and not duplicating effort. This will be particularly important given its finite resources and the importance of ensuring it is spending time where it's most needed rather than duplicating the efforts of others.

*10. Positioning the BBC as a convenor or leader of other media literacy provision is somewhat uncomfortable*

While there was some support for the idea of the BBC as a convenor, particularly because of its ability to elevate the work of others at scale, there was also concern that the BBC is in a weakened position because of past mistakes. To be a convener or indeed a leader, it would be important for the media literacy component of the BBC to be ready to be openly critical and transparent of the mistakes of its news organisation arm in order to avoid being hypocritical or only enabling citizens to critically appraise other actors in the news media ecosystem.

The BBC has also not historically been an active collaborator in the media literacy civil society ecosystem which makes the idea that they would enter the ecosystem as a leader somewhat uncomfortable. It would be important for the BBC to first play a more active role as a member of the community.

*11. There are risks to the BBC's impartial reputation if it is to pursue a more collaborative role with other providers*

Whilst the idea of the BBC being more collaborative and offering support to other media literacy providers such as through providing a platform for them, there was also a concern about how the BBC would evaluate and consider which partnerships or collaborations it could pursue. The concern was that some types of partnership, depending on the organisation, could be perceived as compromising the BBC's impartial stance.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

### *12. It's important not to assume that the BBC is always trusted - it must consistently demonstrate its trustworthiness*

Some were concerned that there is a presumption in the proposals that the BBC is unilaterally trusted or that it will continue to be seen as a trustworthy provider in the future. It's important for the BBC to continue to focus on demonstrating its trustworthiness particularly through transparency.

Georgie Emery - VotesForSchools

Stéphane Goldstein - Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA)

Emily Hanson - First News

Lisa Hobson - Media Education Association

Lucia Kolmjen - Have a Nice Future

Sally Latham - Wikimedia UK

Rupert Meadows - Internet Matters

Sarah Pavey - SP4IL

Hannah Perry - Demos Digital, Demos

Ashmita Rajmohan - Deep Truth Project

Andrew Russell - Into Film

Bruce Ryan

Charlie Shepherd - The Guardian Foundation

Tiff Smyly - The Economist Educational Foundation