

Early years digital media literacy review

Contents

Key findings	3
Introduction	5
Project approach and activity	13
Emerging themes, opportunities and challenges	15
Where are we now?	15
Looking ahead	21
Recommendations	24
Appendix	25

Parent Zone

Parent Zone sits at the heart of modern family life, providing advice, knowledge and support, to shape the best possible future for children, as they embrace the online world.

We conduct research projects with parents and guardians to inform policy and practice working with governments, industry and not-for-profit organisations.

Our education and support programmes reach millions of families every year around the world. We have extensive experience of representing parents and guardians at the highest levels, including as members of the United Nations International Telecommunication Unit, We Protect Global Alliance and the UK Government's Media Literacy Taskforce.

For further information about our work or to discuss any aspect of this report, please contact Research and Development Director, cliff.manning@parentzone.org.uk



The Nuffield Foundation

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social wellbeing. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare and Justice. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not of the Foundation.

Bluesky: [@nuffieldfoundation.org](https://bsky.app/profile/@nuffieldfoundation.org)

X: [@NuffieldFound](https://twitter.com/NuffieldFound)

LinkedIn: [Nuffield Foundation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nuffield-foundation)

Website: www.nuffieldfoundation.org

Key findings

Early years (birth to five) is a critical time from a child development perspective that can set the cognitive, social and behavioural foundations for all subsequent development.

Today's under 5's are already engaging with digital media and technologies, and their engagement is likely to increase, presenting more complex challenges as well as opportunities for learning and wellbeing.

Digital media literacy may help children and families to take advantage of these opportunities, unlock additional benefits and build resilience to new challenges.

There is no universally recognised definition of media literacy, although it has been described as 'the ability to use, understand and create media communications across multiple formats and services'.¹

Defining digital media literacy in relation to very young children is an essential step in enabling parents and educators to support children in developing the foundational competencies needed to thrive in the digital age.

Research with older age groups found media literacy led to a range of positive experiences, and programmes to support media literacy for school aged children have been shown to support children's wellbeing.

Supporting the development of digital media literacy in young children and their families represents a radically different challenge compared to supporting older age groups due to large differences in their cognitive, social and behavioural development.

Interventions at this age must involve caregivers and be as much about the whole family as well as the individual child.

However, research about digital media literacy in the early years remains limited.

Whilst valuable in understanding the potential negative impacts of digital technologies, current research often positions child development without any exposure to digital as an optimal normal state. In fact – in the UK at least – this would be an unlikely scenario and one that would be near impossible to achieve.

Similarly, digital media literacy development is missing from parenting support and guidance for early years educators.

In summary, whilst early years, in general, is a key focus for policy, education and parenting, our collective understanding, strategy and support for early years digital media literacy development

¹ Ofcom Making Sense of Media Annual Plan 23/24

does not reflect families' current experiences nor is it preparing them for the future – and this may have many consequences for children, their families and society more generally.

This project has identified the following recommendations that would help address gaps in understanding and policy and support young children to make sense of and thrive in a digitally connected world:

- 1.** Give greater focus in research, policy and practice to digital media literacy in early years to reflect the everyday experiences of 0-5 year-olds and their families in the UK.
- 2.** Recognise the knowledge of parents and carers – and varied skills that families already have that they can build on to help children establish lifelong habits at the core of digital media literacy.
- 3.** Define and agree the characteristics of digital media literacy from birth to five that includes both 'traditional' screen-based contexts as well as post-screen and AI-powered contexts.
- 4.** Evidence how digital media literacy is or could be, developed in young children and what impacts or benefits this has on their wider and/or later outcomes.
- 5.** Ensure that the critical, diverse roles that parents, carers, wider family members and educators have in developing young children's digital media literacy is taken into account when developing any research or intervention.
- 6.** Include the views of parents, carers, educators and children themselves when defining indicators and shaping interventions – whilst retaining a focus on the best interests of the child.
- 7.** Develop and evaluate interventions for families of under-5s to develop young children's digital media literacy through cross-disciplinary, cross-sector collaboration.
- 8.** Develop and test interventions in parallel with building the evidence base for how digital media literacy develops and can be supported in young children.
- 9.** Provide active support to convene experts and nurture connections between disciplines so that knowledge and expertise on all aspects of early years, digital and media literacy can be shared, reviewed and applied more easily.
- 10.** Look for examples and evidence outside of academic publications and map a broader range of family interventions that may indirectly contribute to the development of children's digital media literacy – beyond specific media literacy interventions. This should be international in scope and include languages other than English.
- 11.** Consider how work in this area relates to public opinion and changing policy – but not be led by those discourses.

Introduction

A digital world

“Our social worlds are now saturated with digital technologies.”²

“Virtually all children in the UK are born into highly technologized environments.”³

- 94% of families with 3-4 year-olds have internet access in the home
- 98% of families with children aged from birth to 36 months have internet access with WiFi connectivity
- 87% of parents of 3-4 year-olds say their child goes online at home or elsewhere
- 51% of all 3-4-year olds use apps for messaging and voice/video calls
- 41% of families with children aged from birth to 36 months say their child ‘owns’ a tablet^{4,5}

Exposure to digital technology is an everyday experience for the majority of young children in the UK and digital technology is now regarded as an important part of family life.⁶ Whilst screen-based media and interactions are currently the prevalent format of engagement across communication, employment and entertainment for the population as a whole, young children are engaging with a wide range of digital technologies, internet-connected devices and AI enabled services. In addition, children’s engagement with technology extends outside of the home or care settings.

Very young children use digital devices in many different locations, most frequently at home but also in the car, in restaurants, when visiting friends/family, at nursery, on public transport, in their pushchair, when shopping and when enjoying community facilities (eg, museums, libraries). Very young children sometimes help to scan items at self-service shop checkouts, to register attendance in medical surgeries, etc.⁷

² Digital Childhoods: Technologies and Children’s Everyday Lives | SpringerLink

³ Research: Toddlers, Tech and Talk | Manchester Metropolitan University

⁴ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research>

⁵ Research: Toddlers, Tech and Talk | Manchester Metropolitan University

⁶ JRC Publications Repository – Young Children (0-8) and Digital Technology – A qualitative study across Europe

⁷ Research: Toddlers, Tech and Talk | Manchester Metropolitan University

Beyond the screen

With many of screenless technologies still in their infancy, the move away from traditional modes and models – and the change in skills required to understand and navigate them – is only going to become greater. As the [Toddlers Tech and Talk report](#) notes:

A focus on ‘screentime’ fails to engage with the many ways that diverse digital media are woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Ofcom, the UK regulator that is required to promote media literacy, has published papers on the implications of emerging technologies such as generative AI and the metaverse on media literacy⁸ but has not as yet considered these technologies and implications in relation to young children. However, Ofcom does note:

*We may understand the broad strokes of a trend, but it may not be until a technology trend is prevalent in users’ lives that the full media literacy implications become apparent. While this work is uncertain, it remains important to consider and understand how these technologies may impact users, and what this means for media literacy, as early as practically possible. This will allow us to take account of the potential risks and support the sector to educate platforms and users about how these risks can be mitigated, as well as how users can take advantage of the myriad of opportunities for flourishing online that new technology trends could create.*⁹

Despite this increase in technology use and the rapidly changing nature of children and parents’ use of digital technologies, research in relation to digital media literacy and early years remains limited.¹⁰

Situating evidence in the real life of families

There is research on under-5s use of digital technologies focussed on how technology can be used to support education.¹¹ However as one meta-analysis notes: ‘apps are simply one type of activity available to young children.’

Where research on young children’s wider digital use is available, it tends to focus on the effect digital media may have on their development and wellbeing.¹² Whilst this is critical in understanding the potentially negative impacts of digital technologies, this framing can sometimes position child development without any exposure to digital as an optimal normal state when in fact – in the UK at least – this would be an unlikely scenario and one that would be near impossible to achieve.¹³ Situating evidence in the real life of families is essential as is balancing our understanding of effects with an understanding of the potential for developing digital media literacy.

⁸ [Future technology and media literacy – Ofcom](#)

⁹ [Future Technology and Media Literacy: Anchor document](#)

¹⁰ [Edinburgh Research Explorer – Young children \(0-8\) and digital technology](#)

¹¹ [A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Educational Apps on Preschool to Grade 3 Children’s Literacy and Math Skills – James Kim, Joshua Gilbert, Qun Yu, Charles Gale, 2021](#)

¹² [The Bedtime Boost trial – Nuffield Foundation](#)

¹³ [Faulty screen time measures hamper national policies: here is a way to address it](#)

Media literacy in policy

The development of media literacy in relation to online safety was acknowledged as a strategic objective by the previous UK government through the publication of the Media Literacy Strategy in 2021¹⁴ by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

We want users to be able to make informed and safer decisions online, to make the most of all the good the internet has to offer. [The Media Literacy strategy] is part of our plan to achieve this by supporting the education and empowerment of all internet users with the key skills and knowledge they need to be safe online.

At the time of writing, the government elected in 2024 has not published a new media literacy strategy. However, it has committed to ‘preparing young people for a digital future’ and ‘building the knowledge, skills and attributes young people need to thrive. This includes embedding digital, oracy and life skills in their learning.’¹⁵

Researching and promoting media literacy for the whole population has been an integral part of Ofcom’s role for some time. The Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA¹⁶) provided greater clarity and specificity on Ofcom’s media literacy duties as originally set out in the Communications Act 2003.¹⁷ These include a duty to ‘heighten public awareness and understanding of how people can protect themselves and others online.’¹⁸

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) Draft Statement of Strategic Priorities for online safety¹⁹ published in 2024 provides guidance on how Ofcom should implement its powers and includes media literacy as one of the priorities.

Media literacy can help tackle a wide variety of online safety issues for internet users of all ages. Without the skills to navigate the digital world, users are more exposed to harmful online content and ultimately can disengage from society, with serious and enduring consequences for communities and democracy.

It is important to acknowledge that, as DCMS’s earlier literature review noted, ‘digital skills form a separate policy area to media literacy, and while digital skills and digital inclusion are related to digital media literacy, the terms (and literature) are not interchangeable.’²⁰

Whilst UK media literacy policy and regulation reference children and young people, they do not specifically reference children under five or how these principles relate to families with under-5s.

¹⁴ [DCMS Online Media Literacy Strategy](#)

¹⁵ [Breaking Down The Barriers To Opportunity](#)

¹⁶ [Online Safety Act 2023](#)

¹⁷ [Communications Act 2003](#)

¹⁸ [Section 165 – Online Safety Act 2023](#)

¹⁹ [Draft Statement of Strategic Priorities for online safety – GOV.UK](#)

²⁰ [Media Literacy Strategy – Mapping Exercise and Literature Review – Phase 1 Report](#)

Why digital media literacy matters

In today's digitally saturated world, increased digital media literacy has the potential to benefit both individuals and wider society. When considering why media literacy matters and what the benefits of media literacy may be in general it may be helpful to consider *'media literacy as a form of context-bound capability development as opposed to a set of neutral, universal competences.'*²¹

Ofcom's exploration of high media literacy amongst children and adults found:²² *'being highly media literate leads to a wide range of positive experiences online'* and *'some [participants] felt it enhanced their sense of connection and belonging through finding other people with similar interests.'*

Evaluations of media literacy interventions delivered in schools show they can improve children's wellbeing.²³ Similarly, a systematic evidence review of the outcomes of gaining digital skills for young people's lives and wellbeing²⁴ found that: *'While technical skills were linked with mixed or even negative outcomes, information skills were linked with positive outcomes'*. Benefits around improving connection and reducing isolation for individuals have also been reported from media literacy interventions with young people in a therapeutic setting.²⁵

Digital media literacy can have longer term benefits for the individual and wider society. As the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) states: *'Without the skills to navigate the digital world, users are more exposed to harmful online content and ultimately can disengage from society, with serious and enduring consequences for communities and democracy.'*²⁶

Digital media literacy can benefit individuals and wider society – but how do these benefits relate to early years?

Do very young children and their families experience any benefits of digital media literacy? If so, what are they and what long-term impacts do they have? And what role can and should parents, carers and educators play?

When considering these questions, perhaps as Sonia Livingstone²⁷ suggests, our response should look beyond the individual child's skills and behaviours and consider the whole family and wider systems.

²¹ [Beyond Solutionism: Differently Motivating Media Literacy | Article | Media and Communication](#)

²² [Exploring High Media Literacy Among Children And Adults](#)

²³ [Improving children's wellbeing through media literacy education: An Irish study](#)

²⁴ [The outcomes of gaining digital skills for young people's lives and wellbeing](#)

²⁵ ["I am not alone": The Additional Benefits of Critical Media Literacy](#)

²⁶ [Draft Statement of Strategic Priorities for online safety – GOV.UK](#)

²⁷ [What's the best we can expect of media literacy? From protectionism to human rights and flourishing](#)

What media literacy initiatives are required for the public to enjoy the capability to realize their full potential as human beings in a digital age? I suggest that this question should be answered collectively rather than individualistically. This is not only because, in our unequal society, if just some people flourish in the digital age, matters become even worse for the others, but also because it takes the commitment of society's institutions to bring about the transformation required.

Supporting families

We know that the quality of parenting that children experience significantly impacts their outcomes.^{28 29} Parents and carers are children's first educators. Young children learn digital skills through watching their parents and other family members engage with technology³⁰ and parents act as gatekeepers or proxy users of digital technology for their child.^{31 32}

Parents mediate their child's tech use in many ways, including as 'gatekeepers' (eg, show child how to use a device, point to items on the screen), in control and supervisory ways (eg, set parental controls, keep an eye from a distance, limit time), as 'enablers' (eg, name colours and shapes, play games and activities together), and in critically reflective ways (eg, encourage a child to seek information via tech and to think about the information). Parents also act as 'models' by using tech themselves in ways that their child seeks to imitate.³³

Whilst there is an understanding of how young children access technologies, how they develop the foundations of digital media literacy – particularly in a post-screen, AI-empowered environment – is less well understood.

The development of digital media literacy in early years is a radically different challenge than for older, school age children due to the large differences in their cognitive, social and behavioural development. Interventions at this age have to involve caregivers and be as much focused on the whole family as well as the individual child. Therefore understanding and supporting parents and carers in the delivery of effective parenting is a critical element for early years digital media literacy development.

Guidance on early years parenting in relation to digital often focuses on screen time and recommended restrictions. For example, the World Health Organisation stipulates no screen use for under-1s.³⁴ Whilst this may mitigate some risks, it may not be practical for many families.

²⁸ [The Effect of Parenting and the Parent-Child Relationship on a Child's Cognitive Development: A Literature Review – PMC](#)

²⁹ [The role of parenting in child development](#)

³⁰ [Edinburgh Research Explorer – Young children \(0-8\) and digital technology](#)

³¹ [The role of parents in the engagement of young children with digital technologies](#)

³² [Young children \(0-8\) and digital technology: a qualitative exploratory study – national report – UK](#)

³³ [Research: Toddlers, Tech and Talk | Manchester Metropolitan University](#)

³⁴ [Guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age](#)

In addition, how young children develop the foundations of digital media literacy, whether in relation to screen-based digital devices or in a post-screen, AI-empowered environment, is less well understood. Many young children already interact with screenless devices such as smart speakers and internet-connected toys. As technologies such as voice assistants, wearables and other internet-connected devices become commonplace in young children's experience of digital tools and media will increasingly be without traditional screens. Therefore, considering this context and the consequences for developing digital media literacy will be important to ensure it remains relevant.

The American Academy of Paediatrics recommends that parents and children (aged 2–18 years) jointly engage in media. Joint media engagement between young children and adults can improve children's learning.³⁵ However, further research is needed to explore the mechanisms behind the benefits of co-use. There is limited research on how this may relate specifically to digital media literacy development.

The combination of screen time guidance, changing technologies, the need for further research and the reality of family life creates a context in which parents engage with digital technologies with and around their young children but may feel confused and inhibited about seeking support to make this engagement beneficial for their child.

The role of educators

The current generation of children in the UK is the first in which the majority of under-5s are spending a large part of their childhood in nurseries and other registered childcare.³⁶ Early childhood educators are therefore a potential source of support for both children and parents.³⁷ However, making this support available requires educators to be able to engage parents³⁸ and have a good understanding of digital media literacy themselves.

Even with effective engagement between parents and educators, supporting digital media literacy in early years will likely present many challenges. Developing learning approaches relevant to very young children's developmental stages and ensuring support for the whole family will be key. However, screen time restrictions and wider concerns around internet access for older children can make the role of technology in early years contentious. Educators' attitudes towards digital technologies may not always align with families' experiences or what may be considered effective support for children's learning.

³⁵ [Does adult-child co-use during digital media use improve children's learning aged 0–6 years?](#)

³⁶ [Best start in life part 1: setting the scene – GOV.UK](#)

³⁷ [Building the skills and confidence of early childhood educators to work with parents: study protocol for the Partnering with Parents cluster randomised controlled trial | BMC Medical Research Methodology](#)

³⁸ [A framework for family engagement : Going beyond the Epstein Framework | Wales Journal of Education](#)

Narrow conceptualized notions of literacy, compounded by national imperatives to raise print literacy standards, add another layer of discursive complexity that comes to the fore when teachers are asked to provide a rationale for the promotion of digital literacies in early years classrooms. A broader framing of literacy, therefore, is needed if the potential of digital technologies in the early years is to be realized.³⁹

Given these challenges, if early years educators are to support children and families in developing digital media literacy, they will need policies, training, guidance and resources to build their skills and confidence within a clear professional framework and a supportive system. However, there is currently no specific reference to digital media literacy in the early years foundation stage statutory framework (EYFS)⁴⁰ and Ofcom does not currently collect data on the critical understanding of media for young children. Whilst digital media literacy in early years education policy and research is missing – particularly for the 0-3 age range – any initiative to resolve this needs also to consider that there are significant capacity gaps in the early years sector.⁴¹ Difficulties in recruiting, training and retaining staff, alongside low pay and an increasing workload, will likely make introducing new requirements for educators a significant challenge.

Investment is needed in the ECEC sector to ensure high-quality training and continuing professional development in the use of digital media in early childhood, including liaison with families.⁴²

³⁹ [Early years teachers and digital literacies: Navigating a kaleidoscope of discourses | Education and Information Technologies](#)

⁴⁰ [Early years foundation stage statutory framework – GOV.UK](#)

⁴¹ [Poor pay and increasing workload forcing early years staff out of the profession](#)

⁴² [Children under 3 in the UK and digital tech: policy recommendations.](#)

Developing foundations for digital media literacy

*As early as the first year of life, babies are developing incipient theories about how the world of people, other living things, objects, and numbers operates... these foundational theories are not simply isolated forms of knowledge but play a profound role in children's everyday lives and subsequent education.*⁴³

In sum, the understanding of and level of support for early years of digital media literacy development do not match the experiences of children and families in the UK. This may mean that children do not experience the potential benefits of digital media literacy.

If we are to avoid any negative consequences and leverage any opportunities that digital technologies may bring, then we need to elevate the status of early years digital media literacy development and associated support. As Faith Rogow highlights, consideration must be given to the effects of digital technologies, but for children to actively participate in society, digital media literacy must be considered in similar terms as other literacies:

*Knowing how to read and write print has been a path to power for centuries... To learn in a world where so many people have access to nearly unlimited information and audiences, children will need critical thinking and discernment skills and the desire to use them... It's time to rethink our educational responses to living in a world where media and digital technologies are woven into the fabric of daily life.*⁴⁴

In a world saturated with rapidly changing digital technologies, the question arises: how can young children be helped to develop the foundations for digital media literacy? And, crucially, how can parents, carers and educators be better informed, supported and empowered in this regard?

⁴³ [Child Development and Early Learning – Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8 – NCBI Bookshelf](#)

⁴⁴ [Media Literacy for Young Children: Teaching Beyond the Screen Time Debates | NAEYC](#)

Project approach and activity

The Early Years Digital Media Literacy Review project – supported by the Nuffield Foundation and led by Parent Zone – sought to improve the available knowledge of current early years digital media literacy interventions, identify opportunities for further work and understand the potential barriers in developing research and practice.

To achieve this, Parent Zone delivered three interlinked workstreams:

- A rapid review of academic literature
- An interdisciplinary expert group
- A cross sector advisory group

Rapid review

To provide a catalyst for discussion and further research, a rapid review was conducted by Lucy Betts and team at Nottingham Trent University to answer the following research questions:

- What initiatives are currently available for families to improve digital media literacy for under-5s?
- What evidence is available on the effectiveness of these interventions?
- What evidence is available on the effectiveness of initiatives for families of children under 5?

Rapid review summary

The [Early Years Media Literacy rapid review](#) did not identify any current interventions for families of 0-5 year-olds specifically to support digital media literacy development. The review of academic literature along with other publications and reports found that where initiatives have been developed, they have focused on the effects of digital technologies on wellbeing and learning rather than digital media literacy development, that digital media literacy interventions are for older children, or that frameworks for digital literacies do not include very young children.

Expert group and workshop

To expand the rapid review findings and facilitate collaboration around the topic, eleven experts working across psychology, cognitive data science, child development, computer science, sociology, media literacy, privacy, parenting and policy were invited to be part of an expert group. The expert group provided feedback and participated in a collaborative workshop to share insights from their fields and identify common areas of importance for further work.

Advisory group

To situate the work of this project within wider practice and policy – and to connect the research with potential opportunities for development and delivery, six experts from key national organisations in early years, education, evaluation and literacy were recruited to an advisory group. The advisory group guided Parent Zone on the project activity and outputs.

Emerging themes, opportunities and challenges

Through the rapid review, expert feedback and consultation the following themes, opportunities and challenges have been identified in relation to the development, evaluation and implementation of digital media literacy interventions for families of 0-5 year-olds in the UK.

Where are we now?

There are limited interventions currently available

The UK government's mapping of online media literacy interventions carried out by DCMS in 2020⁴⁵ identified and characterised 170 initiatives of all kinds available in the UK. The report found that while 35% of all initiatives targeted children of all ages, age-specific initiatives were more focused on early teenage years rather than younger or older children. Only 2% out of 102 responses included 3-4 year-olds – and none were reported for 0-3 year-olds. DCMS also noted that evaluation activity is rare across all initiatives.⁴⁶

Complementing the UK government's findings, the rapid review carried out for this project in 2024 did not identify any current interventions for families of 0-5 year-olds specifically to support digital media literacy development. Some media literacy interventions were identified but lacked robust evaluation, were not specifically for supporting families, did not reflect changes in technologies and understanding and did not appear to be widely accessed.

While the finding may be an accurate reflection of the lack of academic research, it is possible that the nature of a rapid review focused on academic publications in English meant that some key literature was not identified. However, a further exploration of relevant government, policy and grey literature conducted as part of this project reinforced the academic review findings.

⁴⁵ [Media Literacy Strategy – Mapping Exercise and Literature Review – Phase 2 Report](#)

⁴⁶ [Media Literacy Strategy – Mapping Exercise and Literature Review – Phase 1 Report](#)

Evidence (and expertise) is widely distributed

Where evidence for early years digital media literacy exists, it is widely distributed across and within academic disciplines and subdisciplines. In addition, there is a range of potentially relevant publications outside academia. Networks for general media literacy research have been established – for example, Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA)⁴⁷, Ofcom’s Making Sense of Media Network⁴⁸ and the National Association of Media Literacy Educators.⁴⁹ For early years, the digital literacy and multimodal practices of young children (DigiLitEY).⁵⁰ The project ran from 2015 to 2019, bringing together researchers, educators and industry partners across 38 countries, but has now concluded. The distribution of evidence and expertise presents an ongoing challenge when attempting to identify, review and learn from the work produced.

Terminology varies

In addition to knowledge, the terminology used to describe relevant early years digital media literacy research can differ across domains. A review of common keywords used in over 250 randomly selected articles from the first stage of the rapid review in this project identified over 30 related terms. The breadth of terms combined with the wide distribution of publications and expertise presents a further challenge for conducting searches and in comparative analysis.

Young children’s engagement with digital media extends beyond the screen

Much of digital media research focuses on screen use. However, as technologies have rapidly evolved in the last few years, less research is available on the screenless technologies and AI-powered services that young children are likely to be more exposed to in infancy and throughout their lives.

As one researcher asks, ‘How will new developments in AI and in immersive digital environments (eg, the metaverse) blur the lines between reality and fantasy, human interaction and simulation, and what will parents need to know about the impact on their children?’⁵¹

⁴⁷ [Media and Information Literacy Alliance](#)

⁴⁸ [Making Sense of Media Network – Ofcom](#)

⁴⁹ [National Association for Media Literacy Education](#)

⁵⁰ [DigiLitEY](#)

⁵¹ [Putting Digital Media in Balance: The Importance of Human-to-Human Interaction for Young Children](#)

Young children are not fully considered in frameworks for media literacy development

Whilst many elements of existing media literacy strategies and frameworks may apply to under-5s, young children's digital media literacy development is not specifically referenced.

For example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)⁵² General Comment 25 (GC25)⁵³ includes references to digital literacy and requires that education begins when children start school – but there is no requirement for similar learning before school age. There is, however, a general recognition of parents' critical role and the support they need.

States parties should ensure that parents and caregivers have opportunities to gain digital literacy, to learn how technology can support the rights of children and to recognize a child who is a victim of online harm and respond appropriately.

Where GC25 references young children, it is in relation to the potential displacement that digital technology may have on non-digital activities rather than a specific consideration of young children's media literacy development.

States parties should pay specific attention to the effects of technology in the earliest years of life, when brain plasticity is maximal and the social environment, in particular relationships with parents and caregivers, is crucial to shaping children's cognitive, emotional and social development. In the early years, precautions may be required, depending on the design, purpose and uses of technologies.

The UK government's current media literacy strategy⁵⁴ does not reference young children or families. The principles set out in the framework would likely need significant adaptation to be relevant for early years.

⁵² UN Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC) – UNICEF UK

⁵³ General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment

⁵⁴ Online Media Literacy Strategy – GOV.UK

Digital media literacy development is not included in guidance for early years educators

In England, there is currently no specific reference to digital media literacy in the early years foundation stage statutory framework (EYFS).⁵⁵

There are areas of the framework where consideration and support for digital media literacy development can be applied. For example, whilst EYFS does not prescribe a particular teaching approach there is a requirement on educators *‘to decide what they want children in their setting to learn, and the most effective ways to teach it’*. In addition, the EYFS framework references three characteristics of effective approaches to teaching and learning that may be applied to digital media literacy.

Playing and exploring – children investigate and experience things, and ‘have a go’.

Active learning – children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties and enjoy achievements.

Creating and thinking critically – children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

Within Development Matters⁵⁶ – the supporting EYFS educational programme – are seven thematic areas. The ‘Understanding the World’ theme involves *‘guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community’*. Within the Expressive Arts and Design theme the guidance states: *‘It is important that children have regular opportunities to engage with the arts, enabling them to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials’*.

Digital technologies and devices are referenced. However, this is in relation to safeguarding, with educators required to consider *‘how mobile phones, cameras, and other electronic devices with imaging and sharing capabilities are used in the setting.’*

Development Matters acknowledges that partnership between educators and parents/carers is important and that *‘the help that parents give their children at home has a very significant impact on their learning’*. Whilst we must recognise that there are clear differences in how digital media literacy may be integrated within professional settings and the home, the EYFS requires educators to inform parents and carers on how they can share learning at home. This provides a potential bridge between settings and the use of technology. However, whilst educators are required to document and assess children’s learning for accountability purposes and therefore increasingly

⁵⁵ [Early years foundation stage statutory framework – GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-statutory-framework)

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2/development-matters#introduction>

use digital documentation, there is almost no recognition that these practices require high levels of digital literacy for the educator or that this brings digital media into the foreground for children as well.⁵⁷

The Education for a Connected World Framework⁵⁸ developed by the UK Council for Internet Safety is a non-statutory framework that describes *‘the digital knowledge and skills that children and young people should have the opportunity to develop at different ages and stages of their lives’*. The framework is primarily intended for school use, however, the initial stage states it is relevant for children aged 4-7 years-old. The framework predominantly focuses on online safety however it includes digital media literacy-related milestones within the age 4-7 stage, such as *‘I can recognise when and analyse why online content has been designed to influence people’s thoughts, beliefs or restrict their autonomy (eg, fake/misleading reviews, fake news or propaganda)’*.

In Wales, the education curriculum has been developed to support children aged 3-16 years-old. The Digital Competence Framework⁵⁹ progression step one includes references to digital media-literacy related skills and behaviours such as being able to talk about different forms of online communication, being able to find information or working with others to produce digital work. However, it is worth noting that whilst under-5s are considered, there are no specific statements for 3-4 year-olds. Instead, the guidance highlights *‘While the learning continuum is the same for each learner, the pace of progress through it will differ. As a result, the progression steps can only broadly correspond to expectations at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16.’*

In Scotland, the National Practice Guidance for Early Years⁶⁰ includes a section on digital technology and the young child. The guidance does not specifically reference digital media literacy. However, it emphasises learning *‘with and through digital technologies, rather than about digital technology’* as the way to enhance children’s early learning. It also recognises that *‘effective use of digital technologies offers an engaging experience for babies and young children. It can address barriers to learning and improve access for children with additional support needs’*. The guidance references the importance of supporting adults – and the skills they require to do this.

Babies and young children’s engagement with digital technology does not always result in developing digital literacy skills or result in effective learning. High-quality interactions with others is key when learning how to use them.

Specific reference to supporting parents’ digital media literacy skills is not included but it does note that *‘parents and carers know and understand their child best. As the child’s first educators, parents and carers are key partners in supporting their child’s learning’*.

⁵⁷ [Moving from paper-based to digital documentation in Early Childhood Education: democratic potentials and challenges](#).

⁵⁸ [Education for a Connected World – GOV.UK](#)

⁵⁹ [Digital Competence Framework – Hwb](#)

⁶⁰ [Realising the Ambition | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

The Curriculum for Excellence⁶¹ is intended for children and young people aged 3-18 in Scotland. Digital literacy ‘experiences and outcomes’ are included within the technologies area⁶² of the curriculum. Themes covered include using digital products and services, searching, processing and managing information, cyber resilience, and internet safety. Other sections such as Technological Developments in Society and Business also include outcomes relevant to digital media literacy. For example, *‘impact contribution, and relationship of technologies on business, the economy, politics, and the environment.’*

Northern Ireland’s Pre-school Guidance⁶³ does not refer to digital media literacy but does reference the use of ICT and states: *‘It is important that pre-school children find out about and identify the uses of technology in their everyday lives so that it becomes integrated into their play.’*

The guidance also requires that adults, *‘scaffold and support child-initiated interaction through exploration; and act as positive role models by regularly modelling the value they place on their own use of ICT in relevant ways.’*

These examples are not exhaustive but perhaps demonstrate both the general absence of specific digital media literacy educational guidance across the whole of early years and the existing areas that relate to digital media literacy development that can be built upon.

⁶¹ [Curriculum for Excellence](#)

⁶² [Technologies: Experiences and Outcomes](#)

⁶³ [Curricular guidance | Department of Education](#)

Looking ahead

There is a need to define what digital media literacy means for young children and to understand the role parents, carers, other family members and educators play in its development

The need for developing digital media literacy and its subsequent benefits are generally defined within the context of adults or young people. Therefore, a greater understanding of the need and benefits of digital media literacy in relation to young children and their families is needed. However, considering young children's development it is likely that new indicators or a definition of a more foundational stage of media literacy may be needed rather than applying existing models to early years.

Whilst young children may possess digital skills, their developing cognitive and emotional skills mean that they may not understand the consequences of their behaviours.⁶⁴ DCMS's online media literacy literature review noted that:

Frontal cortex of the brain (affecting critical evaluation skills) develops throughout childhood, so younger children (mainly those from 5-11 years-old) with less developed frontal cortices will be less able to judge information based on factors such as context and relevance.

Similarly, whilst this project has considered the digital media literacy development of all children under 5 as an area in need of greater attention, in order to develop a framework much greater consideration is needed of the many development stages within this age range and the changing contexts of the child, parent/carers and educators. A greater focus on under-3s may be needed as research to inform policy and practice development in this age range is particularly sparse.

Parents will play a critical role in developing young children's digital media literacy and realising any potential benefits, therefore evidence on effective parenting in early years is a key component to consider. However, whilst there is a well established general evidence base it has mostly been developed in a pre-digital context. Therefore, developing digital media literacy frameworks for young children may also require a greater understanding of how digital impacts effective parenting and what those indicators are.

As this project has indicated, there is a need for more research. However, as the expert group noted, we know enough about families' day-to-day experiences already and we know enough about the digital saturation of children's lives to be able to test media literacy interventions whilst further research is conducted. Developing responses at all levels, in parallel and in collaboration, is key.

64 (PDF) [Young children & digital technologies: a qualitative exploratory study – national report Belgium](#)

Including the voice of families and educators is needed – whilst retaining a focus on the best interest of the child

The papers identified in the rapid review all highlighted the role parents play in ensuring young children engage with digital media effectively and avoid harm. They also highlighted the need to support parents and carers in developing their own understanding, confidence, and skills as part of this process and in implementing any initiative. Therefore, including parents, carers and wider family members in shaping indicators and approaches will be important in future work. Similarly, including the voices of educators and education providers will be key.

In both cases, ensuring inclusion will be a critical factor for success. As Sonia Livingstone notes:

Since different groups need to know different things, the question of what (and who) media literacy is for should be answered through consultation⁶⁵... It is now for society – policymakers, educators, journalists, designers, industry and more – to hear parents’ voices, value their efforts, address the inequalities that divide them, all to better support them.⁶⁶

Including parents, carers and educators’ views in shaping responses is critical. However, we must recognise children’s rights and balance parents, carers and educators’ perspectives with the best interests of the child.

There is a timely and growing need to improve early years digital media literacy and there is cross sector interest in responding

Research commissioned by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) shows that the general media literacy landscape is complex and fragmented⁶⁷ and, as Ofcom has noted, emerging technologies create many uncertainties in media literacy.

The evident gaps in our understanding and provision for developing young children’s digital media literacy presents opportunities for researchers, practitioners and policymakers to connect across disciplines, develop new approaches and broaden strategies that may improve outcomes for children and families.

⁶⁵ [What’s the best we can expect of media literacy? From protectionism to human rights and flourishing](#)

⁶⁶ [Parenting for a Digital Future](#)

⁶⁷ [Media literacy uptake among ‘hard to reach’ citizens – GOV.UK](#)

However, it must be recognised that increasing the focus on early years, digital media literacy is somewhat at odds with the current focus within policy and media on reducing access to digital media for older children. This is driven by valid parental concerns, but as the 2021 DCMS report on media literacy noted, *‘parental concerns about online harms affecting children can become a barrier to improving children’s’ media literacy levels by restricting their access to technology.*⁶⁸

As the Toddler, Tech and Talk policy recommendations note:

Even very young children are capable of using digital media in beneficial and creative ways that can enhance their lives and learning. While recognising the need for greater security and protection from risks, they should be supported in accessing benefits.⁶⁹

This project has shown there is a willingness amongst researchers, educators, providers and funders to collaborate on improving children’s digital media literacy at a young age – enabling this to happen now may be more challenging but arguably more needed than ever before.

⁶⁸ [Media Literacy Strategy – Mapping Exercise and Literature Review – Phase 2 Report](#)

⁶⁹ <https://doi.org/10.23634/MMU.00637342>

Recommendations

This project has highlighted the importance of work in early years digital media literacy development. It has also uncovered the complexities of reviewing evidence, connecting expertise, defining outcomes, engaging stakeholders, and developing interventions.

Complexity must not be a barrier to action.

If young children are to be effectively supported to make sense of – and thrive – in a digitally connected world there are key actions that can and should be done.

- 1.** Give greater focus in research, policy and practice to digital media literacy in early years to reflect the everyday experiences of 0-5 year-olds and their families in the UK.
- 2.** Recognise the knowledge of parents and carers – and varied skills that families already have that they can build on to help children establish lifelong habits at the core of digital media literacy.
- 3.** Define and agree the characteristics of digital media literacy from birth to five that includes both ‘traditional’ screen-based contexts as well as post-screen and AI-powered contexts.
- 4.** Evidence how digital media literacy is or could be, developed in young children and what impacts or benefits this has on their wider and/or later outcomes.
- 5.** Ensure that the critical, diverse roles that parents, carers, wider family members and educators have in developing young children’s digital media literacy is taken into account when developing any research or intervention.
- 6.** Include the views of parents, carers, educators and children themselves when defining indicators and shaping interventions – whilst retaining a focus on the best interests of the child.
- 7.** Develop and evaluate interventions for families of under-5s to develop young children’s digital media literacy through cross-disciplinary, cross-sector collaboration.
- 8.** Develop and test interventions in parallel with building the evidence base for how digital media literacy develops and can be supported in young children.
- 9.** Provide active support to convene experts and nurture connections between disciplines so that knowledge and expertise on all aspects of early years, digital and media literacy can be shared, reviewed and applied more easily.
- 10.** Look for examples and evidence outside of academic publications and map a broader range of family interventions that may indirectly contribute to the development of children’s digital media literacy – beyond specific media literacy interventions. This should be international in scope and include languages other than English.
- 11.** Consider how work in this area relates to public opinion and changing policy – but not be led by those discourses.

Appendix

Definitions

The table below outlines some key definitions and concepts relevant to early years digital media literacy and this project.

	Produced by	Media literacy definition
Essential Digital Skills	DFE (2018)	N/A
Minimum Digital Living Standards	Good Things Foundation (2023)	N/A
Online Media Literacy Strategy	DCMS (2021)	<p>The strategy sets out a definition of media literacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an understanding of the nature and characteristics of material published by means of the electronic media • an awareness of the impact that such material may have (for example, the impact on the behaviour of those who receive it) • an awareness and understanding of the processes by which such material is selected or made available for publication • an awareness of the available systems by which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the nature of such material may be established • the reliability and accuracy of such material may be established • personal information may be protected • persons to whom such material is made available may control what is received • an awareness of the uses to which the systems mentioned may be put
MILA Framework	MILA (2021)	Media and information literacy (MIL) is the ability to engage fully with media and information in people’s connected daily lives. This means engaging with media and information safely and healthily, critically and actively, with positive social consequences.
Evaluating Media Literacy with a Theory of Change	CEMP, Bournemouth University (2023)	<p>Aligned with MILA’s five lifelong media literacy aspirations, for media literate people to be informed; empowered; healthy; socially conscious and connected.</p> <p>Using this theory of change helps us to move beyond seeing media literacy as a solution in itself, so we can evaluate (and design) media literacy interventions with a better focus on specific, positive change for people, families, communities, societies and improving the health of media ecosystems.</p>
Education for a Connected World	UKCIS (2020)	N/A
Digital Competence Framework	Hwb (Curriculum for Wales, 2022)	N/A
Seven Pillars of Information Literacy	SCONUL (2011)	Information literate people will demonstrate an awareness of how they gather, use, manage, synthesise and create information and data in an ethical manner and will have the information skills to do so effectively.
Global Kids Online	UNICEF, LSE and the EU Kids Online network. Supported by the WeProtect Global Alliance (2016)	N/A

Global media literacy frameworks

	Produced by	Media literacy definition
Media Lit Toolkit	Center for Media Literacy (USA, 2008)	Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyse, evaluate, create and participate using messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to the internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.
A Media Literacy Framework for Australia	Australian Media Literacy Alliance (Aus, 2022)	Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy that is essential for full participation in society.
Digital Media and Information Literacy Framework	Ministry of Communications and Information (Singapore, 2020)	<p>“One of the key outcomes of being digitally ready is being digitally literate – defined as having the knowledge, understanding and attitudes to use technology safely, meaningfully and responsibly.”</p> <p>“The Ministry of Education (Singapore) has defined cyber wellness as the positive wellbeing of Internet users. Cyber wellness encompasses the range of skills and values that online users should embody in order to be a responsible and positive influence online.”</p>
Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework: country readiness and competencies	UNESCO (2013 – possibly superseded below?)	MIL is defined as a set of competencies that empowers citizens to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate and use, to create as well as share information and media content in all formats, using various tools, in a critical, ethical and effective way, in order to participate and engage in personal, professional and societal activities.
Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think critically, Click Wisely	UNESCO (2021)	Media and information literacy is an interrelated set of competencies that help people to maximise advantages and minimise harm in the new information, digital and communication landscapes. Media and information literacy covers competencies that enable people to critically and effectively engage with information, other forms of content, the institutions that facilitate information and diverse types of content, and the discerning use of digital technologies. Capacities in these areas are indispensable for all citizens regardless of their ages or backgrounds.
DigComp	EU (2023)	<p>Refers to skills, knowledge and understanding that allow citizens to use media effectively and safely. In order to enable citizens to access information and to use, critically assess and create media content responsibly and safely, citizens need to possess advanced media literacy skills. Media literacy should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies, but should aim to equip citizens with the critical thinking skills required to exercise judgement, analyse complex realities and recognise the difference between opinion and fact. Source: the EU’s Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2018)</p> <p>(Digital competence is the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society. It is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.)</p>
Media Literacy Policy, North Macedonia	Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (North Macedonia, 2019)	Media literacy is increasingly recognised as a set of competences that contribute to fighting phenomena such as disinformation and propaganda, cyberbullying and surveillance and enable a better use of technology.

	Produced by	Media literacy definition
Base National Common Curriculum	Ministry of Education (Brazil, 2017)	“According to the BNCC, skills related to digital and media literacies should be treated as a commitment from different areas, meaning that it should be taken as a cross-curricular subject. Thus, teachers from different subjects are urged to work on different aspects related to browsing, understanding and producing texts in different media and modalities, such as audios (podcast), websites, social networks, videos (films and animations), games, among others. One of the most important concepts in this document is the multiliteracies idea proposed by several researchers and professors in the United States in the 1990s.” (Taken from MLA article)
21st-Century Readers: DEVELOPING LITERACY SKILLS IN A DIGITAL WORLD	PISA, OECD (2018)	Framed as 21st century reading skills, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical thinking • problem-solving skills • meta-cognitive skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of effective reading strategies to navigate the Internet • able to identify online risks like phishing emails • distinguish between fact and opinion
Core principles of media literacy education	NAMLE (USA, updated 2023)	The ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.
Media Literacy Policy, Ireland	BAI (Ireland, 2021)	This policy, and the media literacy framework detailed within it, specifically avoids using a definition of media literacy. Rather, it focuses on creating a set of competencies, skills indicators and success indicators in language that will be widely understood by citizens, society and stakeholders from varying sectors and that will help to improve media literacy awareness and education. Media literacy is the key to empowering people with the skills and knowledge to understand how media works in this changing environment, to interrogate the accuracy of information, to counter unfair and inaccurate representation, to challenge extremist views and, ultimately, to make better informed media choices.

Thanks

The Early Years Digital Media Literacy Review project was made possible with funding from the Nuffield Foundation and, critically, the very generous support and insight of the whole team, particularly Eleanor Ireland and Ellen Wright.

Special thanks to researchers Reid Allen and Jane Slater – and their lead Lucy Betts – who produced the rapid review at the heart of this project. And also thanks to the experts who shared their valuable time and knowledge to inspire, inform and shape this report.

Finally, to those many others who have offered support and shown interest in the topic. We hope this report will help you take that interest further.

Contributors

Parent Zone

Parent Zone sits at the heart of modern family life, providing advice, knowledge and support, to shape the best possible future for children, as they embrace the online world.

We conduct research projects with parents and guardians to inform policy and practice working with governments, industry and not-for-profit organisations. For further information contact the Research and Development Director, cliff.manning@parentzone.org.uk

Expert group

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., Media Literacy Education Specialist – [InsightersEducation.com](https://insighterseducation.com)

Faith Rogow, PhD, is an independent scholar and long-time media literacy education innovator. She was the founding president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education and a founding editorial board member of the Journal for Media Literacy Education. In addition to several groundbreaking articles on media literacy education in early childhood, Dr. Rogow is the author of *Media Literacy for Young Children: Teaching Beyond the Screen Time Debates* (NAEYC 2022), and co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin 2012) and *Media Literacy in Every Classroom: A Quick Reference Guide* (ASCD 2017).

[Articles and Reviews – Faith Rogow, Ph.D. / Insighters Education](#)

Victoria Nash, Associate Professor, and Senior Policy Fellow – Oxford Internet Institute (OII)

Dr Victoria (Vicki) Nash is Director, Associate Professor and Senior Policy Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) at the University of Oxford. Drawing on her background as a political theorist, her research centres on the governance challenges of digital technologies, with a particular focus on online safety, content moderation and platform regulation. Recent research has included analysis of age verification policies as a tool for balancing the interests of children and adults online, analysis of new European and UK child safety policy measures and qualitative research into family use of digital monitoring tools. She holds several digital policy advisory roles, including membership of the World Economic Forum’s Digital Safety Coalition, and sits on the Advisory Boards of the charity Internet Matters and the new Austrian Interdisciplinary Transformation University. She is frequently called on to give expert evidence in UK and EU policy consultations on broader issues such as platform governance and Internet regulation.

Amy Orben, Programme Leader at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit – University of Cambridge

Dr Amy Orben completed her DPhil at the University of Oxford and MA at the University of Cambridge and now directs an internationally renowned research programme investigating the links between mental health and digital technology use in adolescence. Dr Orben’s work is supported by key national and international funders, charities and foundations, and she advises governments, health officials and public servants around the world, holding appointments on the UK government’s Department for Science, Innovation and Technology College of Experts and the British Academy Public Policy Committee. She has received a range of prestigious awards including the Medical Research Council Early Career Impact Prize (2022), British Psychological Society Award for Outstanding Contributions to Doctoral Research (2019), Society for the Improvement of Psychological Science Mission Award (2020), British Neuroscience Association Researcher Credibility Prize (2021) and UK Reproducibility Network Dorothy Bishop Early Career Researcher Prize (2022).

<https://amyorben.com/>

<https://www.orben.group/>

Jun Zhao, Senior Researcher, Department of Computer Science – Oxford University

Dr Zhao's research focuses on investigating the impact of algorithm-driven decision makings upon our everyday lives, with a particular emphasis on families and young children. For this, she takes a human-centred approach, focusing on understanding the genuine needs of users in order to design technologies with tangible, real-world impacts.

At present, she is leading the KOALA project and the EWADA project. She works closely with schools, children, families as well as child-focused technologists, to understand the technological, societal and regulatory challenges that we are facing. The goal is to inform national and international policymakers, technology designers, and families. More recently, she has co-founded the Oxford Child-Centred Design Lab, dedicated to the advancement of AI design for children.

Vicki Shotbolt, Founder and CEO – Parent Zone

Alongside leading the social enterprise Parent Zone, Vicki sits on the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) executive board and co-chairs the Digital Resilience working group. She is a member of the UK Government's Media Literacy Taskforce and a trustee of the Media and Information Literacy Association.

Tim Smith, Professor in Data Sciences – University of Arts London

Tim J. Smith BSc. PhD. is Professor of Cognitive Data Science in the Creative Computing Institute, University of the Arts London and head of the Cognition in Naturalistic Environments (CINE) Lab. He applies empirical Cognitive and Developmental Psychology methods to questions of Media Cognition and has published widely on the subject both in Psychology and Media journals. His research has informed media practices through collaborations with Dreamworks Animation, BBC, Channel 4, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Gemma Taylor, Associate Professor/Reader – University of Salford

Gemma is an Associate Professor in Developmental Psychology and Psychology Research Theme Co-lead. Gemma is an expert in child development with over 15 years experience conducting research with children aged from 3 months to 4 years. Gemma's research area focuses on children's development in the digital age and children's digital media. Gemma has previously held a prestigious Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant as Principal Investigator, she has contributed to the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POSTnote) publications on children's media use and written evidence for the Education Committee's Screen Time enquiry.

Lucy Betts, Professor – Nottingham Trent University

Lucy is a Professor in Social Developmental Psychology. Her main research interests lie within the area of social developmental psychology. In particular, focusing on experiences of cyberbullying, understanding the distinction between bullying and banter, and teachers' management of bullying, and perceptions of online risks. She has also undertaken research exploring how technology can be used in educational settings and to address inequalities.

Sandra Mathers, Senior Research Fellow – University of Oxford

Sandra began her career as a primary school teacher and her work remains strongly practice and policy-relevant. Her research explores how we can best promote high-quality interactions between adults and children, including developing and evaluating early language and professional development programmes, researching parent-child joint media engagement, large-scale longitudinal studies, evaluations of government early years initiatives, and studying quality and inequality in early education provision.

Ivelise Fortim, Visiting Senior Fellow – London School of Economics

Ivelise is a professor at the Faculty of Human and Health Sciences at PUC-SP, teaching undergraduate courses in Psychology and Digital Games. She is a specialist in Jungian psychology through COGEAE-PUC-SP and in Career Counseling from Sedes Sapientiae. She is the coordinator of Janus – Laboratory of Psychology and Information and Communication Technology Studies. She is a partner at Homo Ludens Innovation and Knowledge and the president of the Institute Criança em Jogo. Senior Visiting Senior Fellow at the Department of Media and Communication, LSE.

Advisory Group

Sarah Horrocks, Digital learning and strategy consultant

Former director of London Connected Learning Centre, now working as a consultant supporting schools, local authorities, MATS and other organisations in conceiving and implementing digital strategy. She is also a lecturer at University College London, Institute of Education in creative digital learning and assessment of creativity.

Fay Lant, Senior Associate – Media Literacy – Ofcom

Fay is part of Ofcom's Making Sense of Media team and leads on their work to improve people's media literacy skills. Her background is in education, both as a secondary school English teacher in Croydon and an EFL teacher in India and Tanzania. Previous roles include Head of School Programmes for the National Literacy Trust, where she chaired the News Literacy Network, and delivering global education programmes for the British Council. In her spare time Fay is a school governor, campaigns to save her local library and runs a community craft group.

Irene Picton, Senior Project Manager and Research Manager – National Literacy Trust

With an interest in what it means to be literate in a digital world, Irene has authored and co-authored numerous evaluation reports, reviews and studies over the last decade. Her work spans critical, digital, media and news literacy and most recently, generative AI and literacy. She is a member of Ofcom's Media Literacy Evaluation Working Group.

Melanie Pilcher, Quality and Standards Manager – Early Years Alliance

Melanie has over 30 years experience working in early years and has been Quality and Standards Manager at the Early Years Alliance for 15 years.

Danielle Mathews, Professor of Psychology – University of Sheffield

Danielle researches how children learn to talk, in particular how infants and young children learn from experience to use words and grammar in a communicatively effective way.

Rapid review team – led by Lucy Betts

Reid Allen, PhD Candidate – City St. Georges, University of London

Reid is a PhD candidate in the Sociology & Criminology department. His research investigates the practice of unauthorised ‘wild’ swimming in London, conducting a spatial ethnography that considers the experiences of Londoners practicing unauthorised swimming and what these experiences tell us about the intersection of polluted leisure, urban public space and social control. He is also experienced as a research assistant previously working with Goldsmiths, University of London, De Montfort University and Nottingham Trent University.

Jane Slater, Senior Lecturer – Nottingham Trent University

Jane is a senior lecturer in the Criminology and Criminal Justice department. Her research interests are around prison, prisoner experiences, particularly those that are incarcerated for a sexual offence, and prison education. She has recently completed her doctoral thesis about prison education for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence, exploring the realistic expectations concerning their future.