

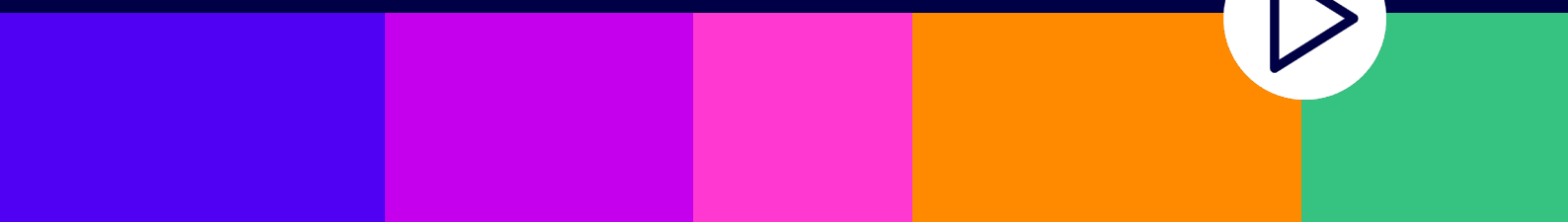


Making Sense of Media Annual Plan

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Making Sense of Media



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1. Executive summary

Media literacy is about people – what they do online to connect with loved ones, purchase essential services, participate in society, access education, enjoy entertainment and so much more. As more and more elements of people’s lives go digital first or digital only, a media literate population is fundamental to a functioning society. It’s about having the skills, the knowledge and the education to flourish online. Online media literacy is also about the platforms on which people do those things. It is both intrinsic to and beyond online safety. Ofcom defines media literacy as the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts. The Making Sense of Media (MSOM) programme focuses on the online environment, acknowledging that there are a range of offline forms of media literacy that we address in our research.

Ofcom has a statutory duty to promote media literacy, as set out in [section 11 of the Communications Act 2003](#), and we also have a duty to make arrangements to carry out research into media literacy matters, as set out in [section 14\(6\)\(a\) of the Communications Act 2003](#). To fulfil these duties, we will aim, over the 2023/24 financial year, to use our position as the UK’s communications regulator, the evidence base and the resources we have developed to equip the media literacy sector to be more effective, explore how to expand funding streams and encourage online platforms to do more on platform, and fund more, off platform.

Background

Our media literacy plan for the 2023/24 financial year is focused on the **‘only Ofcom can do’** elements of media literacy in the UK – as our contribution to addressing the UK’s online media literacy challenges. However, we do have wide-ranging media literacy duties which we have chosen to interpret in a number of ways including as convener of stakeholders and catalyst for new thinking, in order to challenge the media literacy sector to do better and the online platforms to do more to promote media literacy. Others too have a role to play – the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT), the Department for Education (DfE), the Devolved Administrations, professionals supporting children and vulnerable adults are just some examples. Of course, online platforms have a significant opportunity to improve their users’ media literacy both on and offline.

This document provides an update to our [Approach to Online Media Literacy paper](#), which we published in December 2021. In that document we set out our thinking on how the Making Sense of Media programme fits with our online regulatory role.

Media Literacy and Online Safety

Ofcom already regulates [Video Sharing Platforms \(VSPs\)](#) and when the [Online Safety Bill](#), which is currently in Parliament, is enacted, it will become the UK’s online safety regulator. This often leads to questions about how these new online safety duties will relate to our existing media literacy duties. Simply put, our media literacy work both supports and is separate from our existing VSP duties and our forthcoming online safety duties. For example, our work developing media literacy by design principles with platforms is conducted under our existing media literacy duties. It will inform our thinking on online safety, particularly around the measures that can be put in place by platforms to help users empower themselves to keep themselves safer online.

Equally our [report](#) on our first year of video-sharing platform regulation referenced, where appropriate, the actions platforms have taken to enhance their users' media literacy or promote more media literate responses.

Further, most of our pilot interventions in underserved communities focus on a particular risk or harm – older people at risk of fraud or scams, or the resilience of people with learning disabilities to mis- and disinformation. However, we have also commissioned pilot projects to understand how we can better support young people going online independently for the first time. Our intention is to set them up for success by giving them the skills and support they need. All of these interventions occur in areas of financial disadvantage throughout the UK – and are designed to promote flourishing online, as well as online safety.

This document details our progress over the last 16 months since we published our Approach document and our plans for the next fiscal year, from April 2023 to March 2024. We welcome your thoughts and feedback. Please send your observations to: makingsenseofmedia@ofcom.org.uk

2. From Approach to Activity

In our [Approach to Online Media Literacy](#) we detailed our ambitions and intentions until the end of March 2023. The table below demonstrates the progress we have made:

Table 1: What we delivered

What we said...	What we delivered
...on MSOM Engagement	
We will engage in a targeted MSOM network expansion programme, focusing on frontline professionals for a holistic approach to improving media literacy (p. 11, p. 13, p. 27).	We have expanded the MSOM network to over 500 members.
We will host virtual and, where possible, in-person events to foster knowledge and activity sharing, and we plan to do this in a geographically inclusive way. (p. 13, p. 27).	We hosted a four-day tour of the UK Nations in June 2022, presenting our media literacy work in Cardiff, Manchester, Edinburgh and Belfast. We have also hosted virtual events to launch our 2022 Adults' and Children's Media Literacy Trackers, A Day In the Life research and our Evaluation Toolkit .
We will expand and deepen our work to convene, facilitate and support the activities of the wide-ranging media literacy sector. We expect our MSOM Panel and Network to have a key role in this (p. 9). We will create working groups based on the five activity areas (p. 27).	We have refreshed our MSOM Advisory Panel , and their terms of reference to better challenge and support our work. We publish the MSOM Bulletin every six weeks - it's a space for media literacy actors to share their updates, projects, research, and success stories. We have also recruited a range of experts into Working Groups to advise us on our MSOM Establish , Evaluate and Research workstreams.
We will engage with a range of international stakeholders, to ensure that our work is complementary (p. 10).	We have shared our approach and thinking with international regulators, including meeting representatives from Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, and Turkey, and Media Literacy Ireland.
...on MSOM Establish	
As part of our first annual VSP report, scheduled for autumn 2022, we will set out our assessment of the measures in-scope VSPs have used to develop the media literacy of users, including through the design of the user experience and user journey (p. 18).	Ofcom published its first (VSP) Report in October 2022. This highlighted the media literacy tools and information that platforms have in place, including on-platform interventions that support users' media literacy.

What we said...	What we delivered
<p>We will identify issues related to online user engagement and online decision making (p. 27).</p>	<p>We carried out a range of work to build our understanding, including two Behavioural Insight trials - Behavioural insights for online safety: understanding the impact of VSP design on user behaviour and a Serious Game Pilot that trialled a serious game as an approach to making children safer online.</p>
<p>We will seek to establish best practice design principles for media literacy and welcome the steps that some platforms have already taken to build media literacy considerations into the design of their service (p. 4, p. 9, p. 17, p. 27).</p>	<p>We are on track with this work and intend to publish draft principles in autumn 2023.</p> <p>Representatives of online platforms are engaged in this process, with a range of other experts supporting the creation of these principles.</p>
<p>...on MSOM Initiate</p>	<p>...on MSOM Initiate</p>
<p>We will support the sector by commissioning initiatives to serve specific cohorts in communities recognised as having particular media literacy needs (p. 4, p. 9, pp. 14-15).</p> <p>We will provide the sector with learnings from our pilot trials (p. 27).</p>	<p>To build our understanding of what makes a community intervention successful, we published a research report: Ofcom MSOM Research Report - What works in delivering community programmes.</p> <p>In January 2023 we commissioned 13 organisations across the UK to work with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older adults • People with learning difficulties or neurological conditions • Children aged 10 to 14 years • Communities experiencing financial disadvantage <p>These pilot projects will run until March 2024, and our independent experts will evaluate the impact of their work throughout the project. Final evaluation reports will be published in spring 2024.</p>
<p>...on MSOM Evaluate</p>	<p>...on MSOM Evaluate</p>
<p>Ofcom will produce accessible and interactive guidance on how to evaluate media literacy interventions, and an evidence base on what works (p. 9, pp. 20-21, p. 27).</p> <p>We will build, and make publicly available, a digital toolkit to bring together guidance on evaluation and the collective evidence base (p. 22).</p>	<p>Our Evaluation Toolkit was published in February 2023.</p> <p>This provides step-by-step guidance on how to conduct an evaluation and has been designed to meet the needs of a range of delivery organisations. The Toolkit also hosts two libraries compiling current media literacy interventions and relevant published research.</p>

What we said...	What we delivered
<p>We will also seek to coordinate with other organisations and forums that aim to encourage more evaluation of media literacy initiatives and interventions (p. 22).</p>	<p>The DCMS/DSIT Media Literacy Programme Fund and Media Literacy Taskforce Fund are both using this toolkit.</p>
<p>We will continue to add further aspects of “what works” to our Evaluation Toolkit (p. 27).</p>	<p>Our Evaluation Toolkit is deliberately iterative and we welcome any relevant contributions to its media literacy intervention and research libraries.</p>
<p>...on MSOM Research</p>	
<p>We will continue to undertake research in a range of areas (p. 27). We will publish a suite of media literacy research (p. 27).</p> <p>We will work closely with other research practitioners in the media literacy sector and with stakeholders – including online platforms – to identify new areas where research can add most value, and to drive activity in these areas (p. 26).</p> <p>Continued suite of publications and dialogue (p. 27).</p>	<p>Our A Day in the Life research was published in November 2022, detailing how a person’s media literacy is an outcome of a range of factors related to their particular circumstances and underlying attitudes and behaviour.</p> <p>In March 2022, we published our annual suite of longitudinal media literacy research, including, a report into digital exclusion among adults in the UK.</p> <p>We have also commenced research into media literacy and mental health, minority viewpoints, future and immersive technologies, and user attitudes to on-platform interventions. These will be published respectively in spring 2023, summer 2023, summer 2023, and autumn 2023.</p> <p>Our research working group meets six times a year to share research plan and insights. The group aims to inform Ofcom’s media literacy and wider online safety research activity, and to improve the sector-wide research evidence base.</p>

3. Engage

Engaging with the wide range of media literacy expertise within the delivery sector, academia and internationally is a key to knowledge sharing, efficiencies and understanding faster what works. Ofcom will continue to do that in a range of ways this year, which include:

Our Advisory Panel and Expert Working Groups

We are privileged to enjoy the active engagement of our 13 panel members, senior experts from these organisations who offer us critical friendship, horizon scanning and networking opportunities via their extensive contacts. The Panel meets four times a year, and members serve a two-year term. Colleagues from DCMS/DSIT and DfE have observer status on the Panel.



In addition to the Panel, we are grateful for the expertise of our three working groups – supporting our [Establish](#), [Evaluation](#) and [Research](#) work.

Knowledge sharing and Networking

In addition to bringing expertise into Ofcom, we are committed to sharing what we know through our own research and insights. This year we will once again be running in-person events in all Nations in June and a London-based in-person conference in the autumn. Information about these events will be made available to the MSOM network – please [register](#) here.

In addition to these in-person events we will also continue to host virtual research presentations so that our insights can be accessible to more people. We expect to deliver the following:

- Quarterly online network events
- Media Literacy annual tracker briefing
- Media literacy, Immersive Technology and the Future online research and policy briefing
- Ongoing speaking engagements at conferences and seminars in the UK and internationally.

Media literacy for everyone

We will continue to work closely and develop relationships with a range of organisations, to promote the importance of having a media literacy dimension to their delivery and practice: commercial and third-sector, research organisations, academics, other regulators, government departments, etc. to promote the importance of having a media literacy dimension to their delivery and practice.

Future Tech discussion papers

As well as bringing experts together we want to support the development of thinking about near-term future tech and the media literacy opportunities and challenges this offers society. We will do this by publishing a suite of discussion papers over the year. The first paper, on the Metaverse will be published in the spring.

4. Initiate

Our Initiate work is at the heart of Ofcom’s vision to make communications work for everyone. Our objective is not to solve the UK’s media literacy challenges alone, but to better understand how to support those most at risk of online harm, so that we can be a more effective regulator, challenge the media literacy sector to do more for those most at risk, and work with the online platforms to encourage them to expand their programme funding.

Ofcom aims to act as a catalyst, supporting the development of a thriving, sustainable infrastructure of funded media literacy interventions. That infrastructure requires a number of key ingredients that go beyond Ofcom:

- A range of charity, community and voluntary services who are experts in delivering high quality, impactful media literacy interventions
- Trust and Foundation bodies who understand the link between systemic inequalities and media literacy
- Corporate organisations who see the value in developing media literacy skills for their staff and customers and embed it into their objectives – often this will link with a commercial aim
- Statutory funding which allows for longer term impact to be achieved e.g. multi-year contracts.

To develop this infrastructure, we need to play our part. This means we want to encourage the platforms and other funding organisations to see the value in media literacy so that they fund it. And we want to ensure that there are a good number of organisations able to deliver quality media literacy initiatives.

In this financial year we will:

- Support the delivery of 13 media literacy initiatives including providing support for effective evaluation of the work being done, as well as opportunities for sharing learning.



- Demonstrate the value of media literacy interventions in underserved groups to funders and provide them with examples of the impact they can achieve. We will achieve this through partnering with the community organisations we have commissioned to effectively deliver and measure media literacy impact, and we will share these approaches and learning with the wider MSOM network which is predominantly made up of delivery organisations (charity and community services). Throughout the delivery period, we will share approaches and ongoing learning with the sector and funders through published case studies and at relevant conferences and events.

- Build in sustainability to the sector through a workforce development programme, which we will commission in this financial year. We are exploring the best routes to deliver this, which may include working with other regulators or professional bodies.
- Support the sector by identifying key ingredients for success by understanding what works in communities that support the media literacy of their populations well and identifying areas where this is less well developed – so that programmes can be developed within an eco-system and not duplicated in areas of oversaturation.

5. Evaluate

To support the Media Literacy delivery sector, we have created a [toolkit](#) to help practitioners evaluate the impact of media literacy interventions. It is an easy-to-use resource created to support organisations to think systematically about the impact of their intervention, and to critically assess which elements of an intervention have worked and which need refining.

We recognise that in a fragile and competitive funding environment, sharing insights into what has worked and especially what hasn't can be challenging. However, precisely because funding is hard-won, we are keen to support the sector in understanding what really makes a long-term impact, and what doesn't, faster. This is so that assumptions, errors and mistakes can be course-corrected earlier as lessons are shared and learnt more quickly. Ofcom is actively exploring ways to share insights and examples of lessons learnt.

To drive awareness and take up of the toolkit, we will be hosting a series of themed seminars to support the sector. These will run throughout the year according to demand and will focus in the first instance on building a theory of change and measuring for impact. We are also open to revising the toolkit in response to feedback.

Of course, a toolkit, however well used, cannot on its own create a culture where evaluation happens by default, where learnings are shared, and insights maximised. Funders and commissioners of services are critical to this work. Unless and until those investing in the sector ask the right questions about impact and the long-term behavioural change brought about by their investment, evaluation will not become commonplace.

Therefore, in addition to a programme designed to drive take-up of the toolkit amongst the media literacy delivery sector we will also be working with traditional and non-traditional funders of media literacy and other relevant interventions. Our aim is to promote the benefits of and the need to fund appropriate evaluations for media literacy interventions. Together with the sector we want to create a culture within which evaluation is a standard part of media literacy interventions.

6. Establish

Online platforms adopting media literacy by design has the potential to transform the user experience, by providing products and services to users that provide better opportunities for a media literate response. This might be a prompt to read an article before forwarding it on, or a notification that the content you are about to see comes from an unverified source.

We are working with five platforms, as well as a range of academics, behavioural insights experts and advocacy groups within a [Working Group](#) to develop these principles, to build our understanding of best practice and explore potential for a common industry approach.

In this way, we will encourage services to adopt these principles and share their experiences of doing so. We will also be able to consider what we learn as relevant to our future policy work relating to VSPs and forthcoming online safety functions, particularly relating to measures that can help empower users to keep themselves safer online.

To write and build consensus around these principles is complex and challenging, and through our research and our conversations with platforms and working group experts we are making good progress. We expect to publish draft principles in the autumn of 2023. The principles will focus on the design of on-platform interventions which are choice-preserving, self-activating and timely.

In addition to our work with the platforms we are also conducting our own research into user experiences of these interventions, so that we can triangulate what we hear from the platforms with what users tell us. This user perspective will be vital in ensuring the principles are genuinely beneficial to users in their daily life. We anticipate publishing this research alongside the draft principles in autumn 2023.

Once published, we will invite a much wider set of social, search and gaming platforms to explore whether the principles are relevant to them, for example in complex online environments such as VR, and what it would take for other platforms to adopt these principles.

In the 2023/24 financial year we will encourage social, search and gaming platforms to embed best practice for promoting media literacy by design into their products to make the online world safer for everyone.

We will achieve this through:

- Developing best practice principles for promoting media literacy through design in collaboration with our working group
- Engaging with a wide variety of platforms across social, search and gaming to encourage adoption
- Carrying out and, where appropriate, publishing research on on-platform interventions
- Exploring how we convene platform and stakeholder conversations using the best practice principles as a starting point
- Considering whether these principles can play a role in our future guidance to services about how to comply with their forthcoming duties under the Online Safety Bill and the VSP regime.

7. Research

Our media literacy research programme comprises our longstanding quantitative and qualitative trackers as well as bespoke, stand-alone research projects which deepen our knowledge in specific areas.

We have designed the programme to be a resource for the media literacy sector, providing robust, dispassionate and granular insights on a wide range of media literacy topics.

We conduct large-scale surveys of adults and of children and their parents, providing detailed insights from a range of demographic groups. Our [surveys and qualitative work](#) are annual, meaning that (other than recent changes to methodologies due to covid) we are able to provide trends over time. Our datasets are publicly available on our [website](#) and we encourage third parties to use them to conduct their own analysis. We are carrying out our own analyses of these datasets to explore the key drivers and trends in media literacy behaviour and attitudes.



In addition to our trackers, we conduct discretionary research to equip and inform the sector and our own thinking. This year, as last year, our focus will be anchoring our work in the lived experiences of people from a range of backgrounds throughout the UK. Our [Day in the Life](#) research, published in November 2022, brings to life the variety of contexts within which a person's media literacy occurs, and illustrates how media literacy is an outcome of a range of factors related to their particular circumstances and underlying attitudes and behaviour. We will be building on those insights this year to develop detailed behaviour maps as a basis for systematically generating and prioritising a pipeline of potential media literacy interventions.

We continue to be committed to sharing and planning our research through our Research Working Group and MSOM network, and to finding ways of making it easier to navigate the wealth of insights that exist both from our work and that of third parties. This year we are looking forward to sharing the results of our research into:

- Mental health and media literacy which will showcase a broad range of initiatives and suggest some ways activity supporting online media literacy and mental health can be better supported. We expect findings to be published in spring 2023.
- User attitudes to online media literacy interventions which will bring the user perspective into our draft best practice principles and give us an understanding of the way that context interacts with users' opinions of the interventions. We expect to publish this research in autumn 2023 in conjunction with our best practice principles.

- Minority viewpoints, exploring how minority viewpoints are formed, the impact on individuals, the reasons for behaviour when encountering different sources of information, how the veracity of information is assessed and how this differs between different groups. We expect findings to be published in summer 2023.
- Media literacy, Immersive Technology and the Future, which will identify the upcoming media literacy benefits and challenges relating to immersive technology and the metaverse. We expect findings to be published in summer 2023.

This programme of research will deliver insight that plugs known knowledge gaps, both in terms of topics and demographic groups, as a continuing resource for the media literacy sector.

8. From Activity to Outcomes

Ofcom has wide-ranging media literacy duties, and we have some discretion to develop and evolve our areas of focus as needed. This document demonstrates that our programme is a combination of research, community interventions and work to encourage online platforms to support media literacy, which is in line with our media literacy duties and will help support our preparations to be the UK's online safety regulator.

This programme is more than the sum of its parts and will be a multi-year endeavour. Whilst our outcomes will change over time, we are, for now, focused on achieving these things:

- Encouraging the largest online platforms to demonstrate a **commitment** to promoting media literacy of their users through platform design and supporting media literacy initiatives for their communities
- Communities with the most significant need are **well served** by more effective interventions
- Non-traditional media literacy sectors are **empowered** to support media literacy skills development
- Evaluation is **embedded** in media literacy programme delivery
- Research and insights are **shared and utilised** within the sector and beyond
- Impact is **prioritised** by funders.

However, even multi-year programmes must have milestones within them, so we have indicated the expected outputs and outcomes over the next year and beyond in the concluding table below.

Table 2: Our outputs for this year as part of the culture change we want to see

This table highlights our outputs for the financial year 2023/24, and links them to the longer-term strategic outcomes we would like to see. Ofcom will play its role in bringing about these changes and we are interested to hear from others about how their work contributes to these changes.

Outputs 23/24	Desired Culture Change
Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will host one in-person event in each UK nation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a culture of cross-sector and cross-disciplinary networking and collaboration. • The role and importance of media literacy is widely understood across a range of service delivery organisations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will hold an in-person media literacy summit to share Ofcom’s thinking and create space for learning across the media literacy sector. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to expand our network, and use our Panel and Working Groups to encourage coordination and collaboration. 	
Policy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will adopt a ‘research, report, roundtable, response’ model for our thought leadership outputs, which will include a publication on media literacy and mental health and three discussion papers on the media literacy opportunities and challenges of near future technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence informed media literacy policy and practice is prioritised across the UK • Media literacy practice is kept up to date and future-thinking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work with our VSP and Online Safety colleagues to fulfil the requirements related to media literacy in those regimes. 	
Interventions for underserved communities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will have a demonstrable impact on over 2,000 people participating in media literacy interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underserved communities are better served with more frequent and more impactful interventions. • Workforces serving people with vulnerabilities are routinely trained in supporting their community’s media literacy needs. • Children and vulnerable adults will have more media literacy support as the workforces that support them routinely talk about their online lives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will provide evidence of what works in delivering media literacy interventions for older adults, people with learning disabilities, children aged 10 to 14 years and in communities experiencing financial disadvantage. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will provide a training programme including course content for at least one workforce supporting children or vulnerable adults. 	

Outputs 23/24	Desired Culture Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will generate networks in four areas of the UK currently underserved by media literacy provision, creating a blueprint for how to develop a community-based response to media literacy need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every local authority is aware of the key ingredients for successful community-based media literacy interventions.
Evaluation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each of the programmes we commission will be evaluated for impact and learnings from those evaluations will be shared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media literacy interventions are more effective because evaluation is routine within the sector, meaning lessons are learnt faster and best practice adopted more quickly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will publish a report identifying cross-cutting themes and challenges across the interventions and a bank of media literacy outcomes. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will drive take up of the evaluation toolkit across the media literacy delivery sector and beyond, aiming for 100 organisations to be using it by March 2024. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By spring 2024 at least one platform funder and one other major funder of media literacy projects will have incorporated impact evaluation into their processes. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submissions from external stakeholders for initiatives and research are provided, enabling the media literacy libraries to be updated quarterly. 	
Funding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will establish one partnership with key sector funders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is more investment in media literacy and it is focused on funding lasting impact.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will publish a review of funders and their appetite to evaluate. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will engage with funders in adjacent fields to media literacy. 	
Platforms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will publish the co-created Media Literacy by Design Principles in autumn 2023 in draft form and seek stakeholder feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large and small platforms are using the Design Principles to promote media literacy amongst their user base.

Outputs 23/24	Desired Culture Change
Research	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will publish and promote a range of research reports covering both our detailed annual trackers and bespoke research on particular aspects of media literacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research informs practice so that resources are better directed to those who need them most. There is greater awareness of the dimensions of media literacy and how this varies across society There is greater awareness among the sector of the types of research projects being conducted.

Table 3: Indicative publications timeline for 2023-24

Publications	Indicative date
Future tech and media literacy briefing 1	Spring 2023
Mental health and media literacy report	Spring 2023
Qualitative research into minority viewpoints	Summer 2023
Immersive and future technology and media literacy qualitative research	Summer 2023
Future tech and media literacy briefing 2	Summer 2023
Best practice principles for platforms	Autumn 2023
User attitudes to on-platform interventions research	Autumn 2023
Future tech and media literacy briefing 3	Autumn 2023
Initiate case studies	Spring 2024
Initiate evaluation reports	Spring 2024