Ofcom

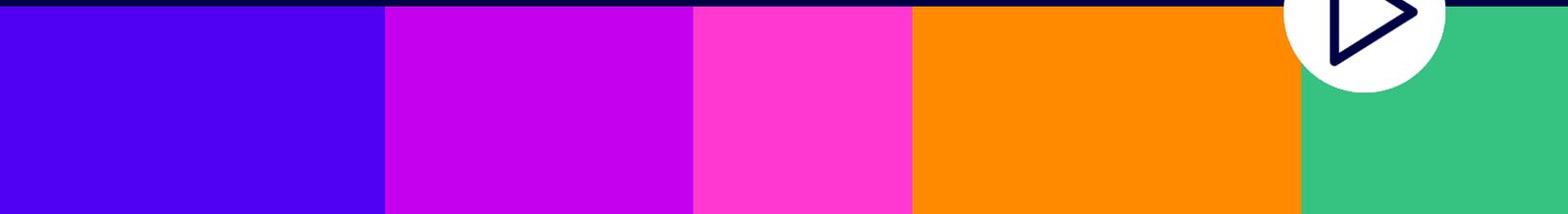# What works in delivering media literacy activities

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Making Sense of Media

Contents

Section

Annex

Foreword

There is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to media literacy. This report invites delivery organisations and fellow commissioners or funders to find the approach that works best for the people they support. This is an exciting opportunity for our shared work to make a meaningful difference to media literacy in the UK. It also presents a challenge for providing solutions that are scalable and underpins our view that Ofcom alone cannot address the issue. Our forthcoming media literacy strategy will present media literacy as "everyone's business" and we look forward to working with as many organisations as possible to make this a reality.

We are grateful to the 13 organisations who delivered and evaluated the media literacy interventions covered in this report. Most were selected because they are experts in the communities they support and know how best to support skills development for those people rather than because they are media literacy organisations. In addition, we challenged them to evaluate their projects as robustly as possible in the budget and time available. They have demonstrated an openness to trying new ways of working and a commitment to achieve the best outcomes for the people they support.

Fundamentally this work has been about learning. So often project reports focus on celebrating successes and, indeed, there is much to celebrate in the work done as part of this project. Instead, we focused on ensuring the report contributes to an understanding of what works in delivering media literacy projects and commends the 13 organisations for their willingness to embrace a learning-focused approach.

Publishing this report does not just mark the end of these projects, but rather acts as a catalyst for conversations about what works for media literacy. We welcome you to join the conversation through our Making Sense of Media network.

By Yih-Choung Teh

Group Director of Strategy and Research, Ofcom

Acknowledgement

Introduction

Making Sense of Media (MSOM) is Ofcom's programme of work to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children.

In December 2022, we commissioned 13 organisations to test and evaluate different approaches to improving media literacy skills[1] among three cohort groups:

- children and young people (aged up to 18 years)
- older adults (aged 65 years and over)
- disabled people and people with learning disabilities

All projects were expected to support people in areas experiencing financial disadvantage.

The commissioned organisations included charities, Community Interest Companies and public sector services of all shapes and sizes from micro, locally-based enterprises to large national charities. They were spread across the UK: from Northern Ireland to Norfolk and from Islington to Inverness. (See table 1 for a list of the commissioned organisations.)

Most organisations were not first and foremost media literacy 'specialists' but found that media literacy fitted within one of their wider organisational aims or activity streams. Projects addressed a variety of media literacy topics (usually in combination), most commonly around: online safety (including identifying scams and avoiding online harms); using technology to get online or using online services; persuasive design (including algorithms and echo chambers); and mis and disinformation.

Those with similar target cohorts tended to focus on similar themes (see table 1):

- Projects targeting children and young people tended to focus on outcomes associated with critical thinking, digital and media savviness and digital citizenship.
- Older-adult projects were more likely to support outcomes around getting online ("access and inclusion"), online safety and making the most of online opportunities.
- Projects working with Disabled people and people with learning disabilities generally focussed on online safety outcomes.

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[1] Ofcom defines media literacy as "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications across multiple formats and services".

Table 1: Overview of project outcome areas

Project lead organisation	Target group	Access and inclusion	Online safety, privacy and protection from harm	Critical thinking about content	Digital and media savvy	Digital citizenship and media engagement
Salford Foundation	Children and young people		●	●		●
Guardian Foundation				●	●	●
Praesidio Safeguarding				●	●	●
ProMo Cymru				●	●	●
Norfolk Libraries	Older adults	●	●	●		●
Age UK East London		●	●			●
Advice NI		●	●	●		●
Red Chair Highland		●	●			
West Nottinghamshire College			●			●
Mencap NI	Disabled people and people with learning disabilities		●			●
Mencap Liverpool & Sefton			●			
AbilityNet		●	●	●		
The Brain Charity			●	●		

We asked each organisation to design their own intervention, recognising their expertise in the cohorts they work with. Several organisations used co-design approaches to develop their project to a greater or lesser extent within the 14 months they had available for delivery. The projects directly reached 2,717 people across the three target groups in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The three sections highlight themes and learning across projects for each target cohort. We recognise these are not the only cohorts who struggle with media literacy and that there is intersectionality within each target group, for example Mencap NI worked with young people with learning disabilities and AbilityNet worked in retirement villages. However, there were some clear themes and commonality across the projects as well as some clear differences in approach. Based on the learnings from this work, each section includes Ofcom's tips for anyone planning to deliver future projects to the target group. Not all the tips are unique to delivering media literacy projects – rather, they are a reminder of some of the core considerations to take into account.

The report also summarises the main challenges and lessons learned in terms of evaluating media literacy interventions. It closes with a recap of the main insights and lessons, and recommendations for project commissioning, planning, evaluation and reporting in future.

Summary of key findings

One of the underpinning principles of this piece of work was evaluation. We wanted to understand whether the projects made an impact on the participants (and if so, what was this impact) and to capture learning about effective ways to deliver media literacy interventions. Throughout the report we have provided examples where each organisation reflected on their delivery and adapted in response to the need they had identified.

A range of evaluation support was available to help with this (Appendix A). Overviews of Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) are available in Appendix B (Impact KEQs) and Appendix C (Process KEQs).

All projects delivered outcomes-based evaluations, which focused on whether or not specific anticipated changes had occurred by the end of the programme. Most of them used pre and post-surveys with some including semi-structured interviews and focus groups. This approach was best suited to the resources and circumstances of commissioned projects in a relatively short and busy delivery window but it should be noted it did not allow for follow up with participants beyond the immediate wrap-up of the project.

All the projects collated, analysed and reported their findings. Their final reports can be found on the Ofcom MSOM website.

Following interventions, projects reported positive impacts for their participants, including:

Children and young people	• greater knowledge, awareness and understanding of algorithms and their role in content promotion; • improvements in levels of news literacy, and confidence in spotting 'fake news' and other forms of mis and disinformation; • evidence of critical thinking skills in action (although research was not designed to see if this translated into more informed and questioning behaviour in participants' everyday online lives).
Older adults	• increased digital skills that enabled older adults to get online and access key services; • increased confidence in how to spot, protect themselves from and/or respond to online threats and scams; • some suggestion that increased skills, confidence and access to devices had contributed in the short-term to reduced social isolation and loneliness among older adults.
Disabled people and people with learning disabilities	• improvements in knowledge, skills and confidence to engage in online activity and stay safe online (although concerns about being scammed often persisted, possibly because of a heightened awareness of potential scamming methods after the training); • lifestyle and mental health benefits as a result of increased use of online services, such as accessing entertainment, finding deals and keeping in touch with family and friends.

More broadly, the projects demonstrated the benefits of embedding evaluation within media literacy projects by providing evidence that adds to the growing body of research around how best to support target groups to improve their media literacy.

Media literacy projects with children and young people

Table 2: Children and young people project summary

Project lead organisation	Participants	Co-design	Activities type	Volunteers involved in delivery	Device/ data* provision
Salford Foundation	328 young people	Yes	Six weekly one-hour sessions delivered in-person in youth club, school and community settings	Yes	No
Guardian Foundation	437 parents and children 25 community facilitators	No	Drop-in sessions for families hosted by local libraries	Yes	No
Praesidio Safeguarding	33 children and young people	Yes	Activities delivered across seven weekly sessions to three different cohorts of children in school settings	No	No
ProMo Cymru	85 young people	Yes	In-person group sessions involving social media and game-based activities delivered in youth club settings	Yes	No

*Data = SIM cards and data plans to enable participants to get online.

Starting points

Projects working with children and young people identified a lack of critical awareness about the veracity and authenticity of online content and the way it is brought to users' attention as the most appropriate focus of their interventions.

The baseline surveys that they carried out tended to confirm the assumption that many of the children and young people involved in the projects had little knowledge and understanding of the technology behind content promotion (e.g. persuasive design driven by algorithms). In some cases, the baseline evidence indicated that young people aged 10-14 years are susceptible to over-estimating their knowledge of persuasive design.

This baseline evidence also indicated that children and young people had limited awareness that content could be misleading (whether intentionally or otherwise) and potentially harmful.

Other baseline evidence showed that children and young people had a better grasp of online safety topics such as cyberbullying and password security, which tend to be taught widely in schools. Because of this, the Salford Foundation found that quiz questions on these topics were too easy for the target group of 10- to 14-year-olds, which necessitated a change in the way this was measured later in the project.

Outcomes

Following the various interventions children and young people reported greater knowledge, awareness and understanding of algorithms and their role in content promotion and targeting, including how this could benefit online users (with more tailored content based on their interests) and act in more negative ways (e.g. by amplifying echo chambers).

Levels of children and young people's news literacy also improved, as did their confidence in spotting 'fake news' and other forms of mis and disinformation.

There was some evidence that the participants were more inclined to take a critical view of information and content online, and some qualitative demonstration of critical thinking skills in action. However, none of the projects collected evidence around longer-term change to establish if this translated into more informed and questioning behaviour in participants' everyday online lives.

Three projects also worked with different groups of adult participants, to help them understand the media literacy needs of children and young people and provide practical support. They found some evidence after the interventions that parents had improved their own media and news literacy knowledge and confidence, and also that facilitators trained to deliver interventions (e.g. librarians, youth workers) had increased their own knowledge and confidence in supporting young people and families with media literacy using project resources.[2]

Lessons learned

Planning and engagement

Only one project initially planned to work in schools. However, all organisations working with children and young people ended up working with schools in some way. Delivery organisations reflected that working through schools was the only way to deliver the project with the target audience, within the given timeframe.

Even where they were keen to participate, community groups and settings did not always have the capacity to support projects due to funding and related staffing challenges, as well as full schedules of activities. Other drawbacks included not knowing how many children and young people would attend sessions or whether the group would be consistent week after week if there was more than one session.

Target group needs and interests

The projects found that it was important to thoroughly research existing media literacy levels and gaps in knowledge among children and young people before designing an intervention. There was a risk in underestimating existing levels of knowledge if materials were not cross-referenced with what is already taught in schools, colleges and through other local projects.

Co-design, consultation and user testing helped to avoid making assumptions about which topics were of most interest. Choosing to focus on areas not currently covered by teaching in school (on topics like 'online stranger danger' and 'cyber-bullying') also helped with sustained engagement.

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[2] It was not possible on the available evidence to determine the extent to which these adult participants put this new knowledge, understanding, skills and resources to use in supporting children and young people.

Delivery settings

Organisations found that flexible delivery models were needed, in order to work across different types of community settings. More structured provision tended to work best through school settings, whereas more informal drop-in models tended to find success in libraries or youth clubs, reflecting families' and young people's use of them.

Projects found working through schools and community settings easier where they had pre-existing relationships prior to the project. Libraries were easier to engage than other community settings because they are used to offering workshops and training.

Working indirectly through community settings presented some challenges compared to projects doing direct delivery themselves. For example, participant numbers were often unpredictable, and staff and volunteers in community settings might recruit participants outside the target age range. While the flexibility of community settings presented a challenge to structured project delivery, they were well-equipped to host informal discussions e.g. where Promo Cymru engaged youth groups as part of their co-production approach.

Community settings also had differing facilities and access to technology and resources, which meant interventions needed to be adaptable to suit every new circumstance. This meant everything from taking along devices to having print-outs ready just in case, and always ensuring there was an alternative option for delivery in case of a change to the resources or space available. The benefits of working within community settings are the highly motivated staff and volunteers who know their communities and their needs best. The most effective methodology is therefore likely to be a "train the trainer" model, although the time and resource required to allow for staffing challenges, and to build confidence as well as skills, are significant. As the case study below outlines, trainers may feel uneasy about being seen as the "expert" on a particular topic.

Sessions, activities and materials

Projects noted that facilitated workshops were an effective approach to supporting media literacy, and high-quality activities and resources were essential for ensuring sessions were engaging and impactful with children and young people.

Interactive sessions that used fun, gamified and kinaesthetic activities worked best with children and young people. These approaches helped differentiate activities from school lessons, especially when held in school club settings or over the weekend or holidays.

Activities also worked well when they were tailored to incorporate real-life, relatable content based on the platforms that children and young people regularly used, as well as focusing on contemporary issues. At the same time, it was important they were age appropriate.

Projects also noted the importance of exploring the online world in safe and non-judgemental spaces. Some projects found young people engaged better with material focused on positive or creative opportunities online, rather than material focused exclusively on risks.

Ofcom's tips for supporting children and young people

- Plan long enough timelines to build relationships and trust with local youth organisations, as well as to understand their needs, capacities and the potential for partnership.
- Use co-design and pilot approaches to sense-check initial needs research and ensure interventions are appropriately targeted in terms of level and content (including reviewing against the other opportunities children and young people have to access support with media literacy e.g. in school or through other projects available locally).
- Work through formal settings with timetabled activities and regular attendance patterns (e.g. schools) if it is important to ensure reach and engagement, rather than settings with drop-in provision (like youth clubs and libraries).
- When working in community settings, a train the trainer model is likely to be most effective and, in order to achieve this, a significant investment of time is required.
- Be aware of the technology and resources available in community settings and adapt delivery to fit them if need be. Also make sure a "plan b" is in place in informal settings where control of the environment is harder.
- Ensure activities are fun, interactive, engaging and incorporate real-life content. Where possible start with creative digital activities and build in the media literacy.
- Work with community-based staff to assess their level of comfort with media literacy topics, provide training where required and help manage their (and their target group's) expectations regarding the support they are able to provide.
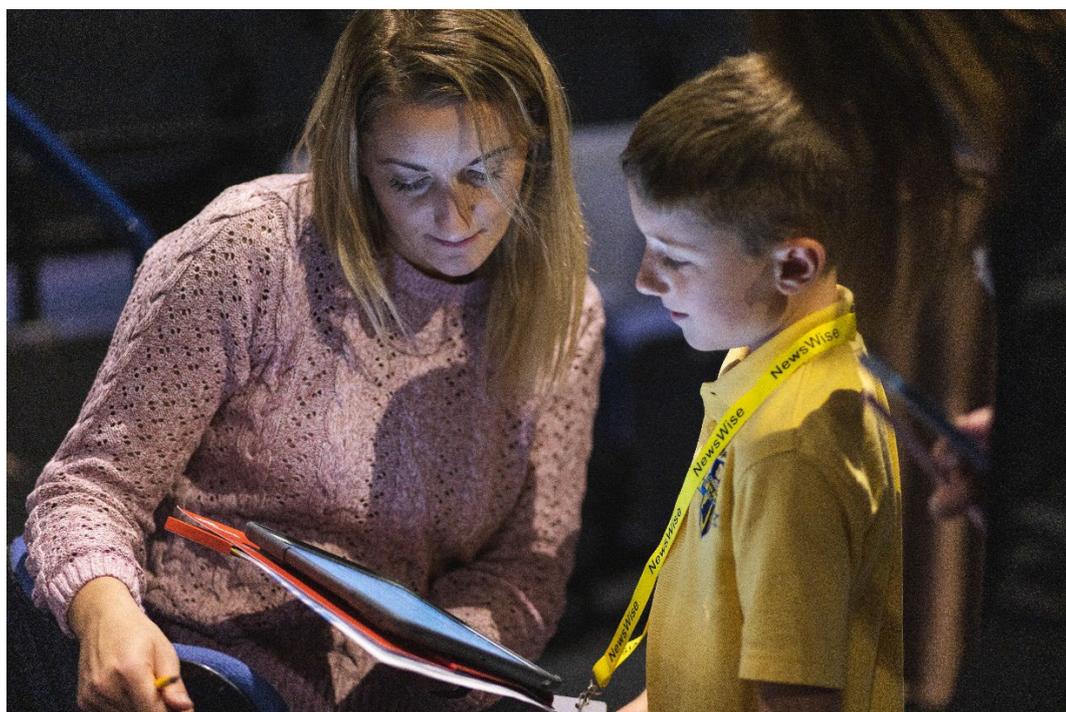
Media literacy projects with older adults

Table 3: Older adults project summary

Project lead organisation	Participants	Co-design	Activities type	Volunteers	Device/data* provision
Norfolk Libraries	392 older adults	No	1-2-1 drop-in and bookable face-to-face appointments in branches	No	No
Age UK East London	85 older adults	No	6–8-week digital courses and digital drop-in sessions	No	Yes
Advice NI	105 older adults 10 digital champions	No	Accredited digital champion training and champion-led training in communities	Yes	Yes
Red Chair Highland	290 older adults	No	1-2-1 support and drop-in sessions, group workshops, community outreach sessions and remote support	No	Yes
West Nottinghamshire College	72 older adults	No	Mix of 1-2-1, paired and group one-hour sessions held weekly over four weeks	No	No

*Data = SIM cards and data plans to enable participants to get online.

Starting points

Most projects working with older adults identified low digital skills and the potential threats of online misinformation and scams (including phishing emails, fraudulent websites, and identity theft) as the most appropriate focus for their interventions.

The projects found through baseline assessment that, in general, older adults had much lower levels of confidence and digital skills than expected, a lack of access to good digital equipment, and a fear of using the internet (e.g. due to the risk of scams).

The project Theories of Change highlighted that the consequences of these problems included lack of access to key services such as banking, health services and shopping, and communications platforms that help keep people connected, as well as increased risk of falling victim to a scam when they are online.

Outcomes

Following the interventions, older adults reported improved skills to get online and access key services. Multiple projects reported that older adults were able to complete more digital tasks (e.g. send an email, shop online etc.) and had started to use devices more frequently. This group of projects were keen to provide participants with loaned or subsidised devices and made links across to the national data and device banks.

The projects also reported that older adults had increased confidence in how to spot, protect themselves from and/or respond to online threats and scams. This was often accompanied by access to device support, such as setting up security on devices and two-factor authentication in accounts.

However, there can be a misalignment between the confidence and ability of older adults to spot scams. Norfolk Libraries highlighted a possible gap between participants' confidence in spotting scam emails and their actual ability to spot them. This highlights a need to not just focus on improving people's media literacy confidence and skills but to take a metacognitive approach, focusing on aligning people's skill level with their confidence level.

While project timelines limited the extent to which long-term outcomes data could be measured, there was some suggestion that increased skills, confidence and access to devices had already contributed to reduced social isolation and loneliness among older adults.

Lessons learned

Planning and engagement

It was harder to recruit older adults to participate in media literacy projects than the organisations had anticipated, not least due to underestimating the scale of resistance to online media. The projects found that many older adults were wary about technology, and sceptical of what they could learn. The older adults felt that the risks outweighed the benefits.

The projects found that recruitment was more successful when they engaged older adults based on their current needs or interests. Often this related to the participants wanting a straightforward solution to a specific lifestyle need (e.g. to save money), experiencing difficulties with a device or wanting to learn a specific task online. An experience which highlighted a positive benefit of being online would then lead to more involved and/or prolonged engagement.

In line with wider evidence, projects found that activities held in local social hubs or other informal environments (e.g. community centres) helped to engage some older adults. This appealed to social motivations to make, meet and spend time with friends.

Recruitment via family members was also an effective route (e.g. targeting children or grandchildren on social media, who would then make a direct enquiry or refer the older adult), as were more traditional, informal approaches focused on building a relationship.

Target group needs and interests

Content that focused on how to identify and avoid scams was one of the most popular topics among older adults, as falling victim to scams was one of their main fears.

Some projects also overestimated the digital skills of older adults they engaged. This meant they ultimately focused more on digital access and inclusion than other media literacy areas or provided support over a longer time period than originally anticipated.

Delivery settings

Content that focused on how to identify and avoid scams was one of the most popular topics among older adults, as falling victim to scams was one of their main fears.

Some projects also overestimated the digital skills of older adults they engaged. This meant they ultimately focused more on digital access and inclusion than other media literacy areas or provided support over a longer time period than originally anticipated.

Spotlight: building foundational skills to enable remote support

Red Chair Highland aimed to support older adults to navigate the digital landscape safely and confidently. They provided a range of support services, including remote support via phone, email, or video calls for individuals unable to access physical services due to geographical or other constraints. However, their final evaluation highlighted that remote support was not effective in all circumstances:

"*While successful for those with prior face-to-face support experience, remote support methods faced challenges in addressing digital literacy issues for those lacking foundation digital skills. Remote digital support was found to be mostly ineffective where participants had not already received one-to-one support to help them build a certain level of digital literacy first.*"

Evaluating the success of digital intervention activities when supporting older adults with online media literacy in the Highlands, April 2024

Sessions, activities and materials

One-to-one sessions worked best with older adults who had lower confidence or lower abilities. This enabled person-centred support, paced to the needs of the individual.

Spotlight: using person-centred approaches to help overcome apathy

Norfolk Library Service aimed to support older adults to get online, build their confidence with digital devices, and broaden their internet use through drop-in, 1-2-1 and group support. Interest in the project was initially much lower than anticipated, which staff fed back was due to fear about technology and going online and low levels of understanding about the relevance and potential benefits of using the internet.

"*Staff came up with effective ways to address this, for example by asking customers to set goals… for their sessions in advance. It was also useful to find out about the person first, discover their likes and dislikes, and use these to get them interested. One staff member mentioned discovering that a customer was an avid cook and gardener, so began by showing them how to find recipes online and use Pinterest to find gardening inspiration.*"

Online, safe and in control: end of project report, April 2024

Group sessions were also popular but were less effective where participants had a wide range of digital abilities. Sessions could often be hindered by learners progressing at different rates, or having lots of questions that could not be covered within the session itself, highlighting the need for facilitators to differentiate activities based on ability.

For both session types, follow-up support was essential for older adults who had questions after the session, or developed fresh anxieties or encountered other problems as a result of their new or increased online activity. Commissioned organisations allowed for this in different ways, including provision of printed "reminder" sheets or ongoing drop-in sessions for continued follow up. This highlights the particular importance for planning for project sustainability when delivering media literacy activities with older adults.

Digital champion models worked well with older adults as people with similar lived experiences were often seen as more relatable than 'tech experts'. Advice NI were also particularly successful in recruiting volunteers who could support participants in their home language including Polish and Cantonese, further emphasising how volunteers can often provide better support than more formal experts.

> **Spotlight: using a peer support approach to overcome stigma or shame**
>
> **Advice NI** aimed to support older adults to develop greater confidence in carrying out basic, important online tasks via a train-the trainer approach. The project identified higher levels of fear about online media than anticipated, and saw how activities that encouraged a peer support approach within workshops was essential to creating a safe space:
>
> "*Part of the beauty of the training was the ability for people to interact, not necessarily with the Digital Champion but amongst themselves, telling stories about their problems and their issues… The interactive tasks drew out conversation and gave learners a trusted environment where they felt safe to talk. As one Digital Champion said, 'some learners showed a lot of courage in admitting that they'd been scammed or had lost money online; it took courage to share that. But sharing those experiences taught everybody a lot'.*"
>
> *Rights4Seniors digital project: evaluation report, April 2024*

Ofcom's tips for supporting older adults

- Focus engagement on immediate needs (e.g. saving money) or other motivations (e.g. socialising) and avoid longer-term commitments (e.g. courses). Children or grandchildren can be effective in recruiting older family members.
- Encourage a positive outlook towards online media by highlighting its advantages and directly addressing any negative attitudes that are preventing engagement (e.g. via workshops or peer support).
- Advertise and prioritise delivery within familiar, social community settings that are close to where participants live and/or within their regular routines.
- Review individual digital literacy levels (in terms of access and inclusion) in advance of sessions and, for group sessions, either cluster participants into similar levels or differentiate activities, providing different "levels" of the same activity so that it is accessible for all participants.
- Prioritise face-to-face and hybrid support models – or conduct a careful review of digital literacy levels before considering remote support.
- Ensure follow-up support is available for older adults after media literacy sessions, this might include printed resources, signposted support and/or drop-in sessions.

Media literacy projects with disabled people and people with learning disabilities

Table 4: Disabled people and people with learning disabilities project summary

Project lead organisation	Participants	Co-design	Activities type	Volunteers	Device/ resource provision
Mencap NI	87 young people with a learning disability 19 parents	No	Group-based media literacy sessions added to existing health and wellbeing programme	No	No
Mencap Liverpool & Sefton	83 young people with a learning disability 1 digital champion	Yes	Group sessions and online educational videos created by Digital Champion	Yes	No
AbilityNet	183 residents 33 staff	No	Series of training modules delivered in supported housing settings	Yes	Yes
The Brain Charity	258 neurodivergent teenagers 191 carers or who work in social care	No	Group workshops on different topics	No	No

Starting points

Projects working with Disabled people and people with learning disabilities identified the potential threats of online misinformation (e.g. conspiracy theories, fakes news) and scams (e.g. online grooming, catfishing) as the main focus for their interventions.

Through scoping research and baseline assessment, they found that people faced several key barriers to their safe and effective use of online services. This included low levels of digital skills, low confidence and being vulnerable to scams, misinformation and extremist ideologies.

Some people with a learning disability also faced challenges in terms of device use, such as limited fine/gross motor skills needed to operate devices, as well as difficulty understanding technology and content and understanding the 'rules of engagement' for digital content.

Neurodivergent individuals disproportionately struggled with identifying what information is reliable, making rational decisions around online interactions and identifying risks without external support.

Outcomes

Following the interventions, most Disabled people and people with learning disabilities experienced improvements in their knowledge, skills and confidence to engage in online activity and stay safe online.

In particular, people felt more confident about their ability to spot online threats and scams. However, concerns about being scammed often persisted, possibly because of a heightened awareness of potential scamming methods after the training.

There was also some evidence to suggest that projects would deliver lifestyle and mental health benefits as a result of increased use of online services, such as accessing entertainment, finding deals and keeping in touch with family and friends.

Several projects that also worked with supporters of Disabled people – such as parents, family carers and care staff – found evidence that these people also increased their confidence and ability to get online, protect themselves and provide better support for the person they cared for.

Lessons learned

Planning and engagement

Projects faced significant recruitment challenges, despite initial scoping suggesting that there would be strong demand for free media literacy opportunities. The Brain Charity found that when they talked about "media literacy" take up was low so they changed their approach. Working with local organisations, they identified particular concerns around online misogyny and worked to address this need, resulting in far greater engagement.

Partnerships with organisations who held existing, trusted relationships with target groups were vital to engagement but were not always a guaranteed route. Partnerships could be complex where different parties had different priorities, highlighting the importance of early planning conversations to establish mutual goals, responsibilities and agreement.

Projects noted that some young Disabled people and people with learning disabilities were either embarrassed to admit that they needed support or were unaware of their support needs. Sensitive messaging was therefore particularly important for this target group, including avoiding technical jargon and digital terminology.

> **Spotlight: supporting struggling learners with tailored volunteer support**
>
> **AbilityNet** aimed to support residents living in residential villages to use their devices, learn a digital skill and spot, avoid and respond to online scams. They recognised through early pilot sessions that the confidence and knowledge levels of some residents were much lower than anticipated, and that these individuals would need additional support:
>
> *"Through the pilot sessions it was recognised how confused the residents were by even simple tech... [T]he introduction of tailored one-on-one sessions with volunteers proved crucial [to achieving our outcomes]."*
>
> ***ConnectingU With Confidence: bridging the gap with digital media literacy skills, April 2024***

Target group needs and interests

Young people with a learning disability were interested in topics such as understanding digital footprints, AI and protection from online harms, while people with a neurological condition were more interested in topics such as fake news and dangerous ideologies.

The more digitally confident participants tended to express interest in more complex sessions than originally anticipated.

Parent sessions were not as well attended as projects had hoped in some cases. Lack of childcare for children not participating in the project was considered to be one of the main reasons for this, highlighting the practical challenges that need to be considered when engaging parents and carers.

> **Spotlight: creating more targeted, needs-led content through lived experience design**
>
> **Mencap** aimed to help people with a learning disability increase their ability to identify and respond to harmful content, improve their awareness of mis and disinformation, and develop resilience towards online scams. The project was underpinned by scoping research to identify what topics workshops should focus on:
>
> *"We co-designed and delivered two focus groups with Mencap Liverpool and Sefton reaching 17 people with a learning disability, both online and face to face. This helped us to understand more about the experiences people with a learning disability have encountered online, their confidence levels, concerns and the topics they would like to learn more about to inform our content creation."*
>
> ***'Pause, Think, Click' media literacy project: evaluation report, February 2024***

Delivery settings

Activities worked well when delivered through known, trusted locations that participants were familiar with and surrounded by family and/or friends (for example, charity office premises with other service users or supported living services).

Delivery in these locations also ensured that the environment would be accessible and comfortable for participants. However, the lack of IT equipment in some community venues meant there were fewer opportunities than planned for practical, hands-on experience accessing online activities, demonstrating the need for collaborative planning with community settings and a back-up plan with either analogue or already downloaded content.

> **Spotlight: supporting digitally excluded participants with access to IT equipment**
>
> **Mencap NI** aimed to build the capacity of young people with a learning disability and their parents to engage in online activity and stay safe online. The project delivered a series of four-to-six-week, face-to-face workshops in Belfast and the Fermanagh/Omagh areas. The sessions were designed to be highly interactive. However the lack of IT equipment (e.g. smartphones, laptops and games consoles) limited the opportunity for hands-on, practical activities:
>
> *"[In future,] having access to 'IT kits' containing a range of hardware would enable the staff to organise more interactive sessions where young people and families could try*

out newly acquired skills, look for information, explore different sites of interest to them and find out how to set up effective security measures."

Be Safe Online project: evaluation report, March 2024

Sessions, activities and materials

Interactive sessions that focused on fun, informal activities, and were clearly differentiated from school and other formal activities, worked well. Sessions were also felt to be particularly effective when led by someone with direct lived experience of a specific condition, or experience of supporting someone from the target group.

Different session structures were suited to different types of activities. Where sessions focused on raising awareness, group sessions enabled discussion and debate between participants. One-to-one support, often with the help of volunteers, was more suited to supporting Disabled people and people with learning disabilities to develop their digital skills and to learn how to do different tasks online.

However, some noted that one-to-one sessions were not appropriate for all audiences, as there was a risk that they could encourage a dependent relationship outside of the project aims.

Sessions worked best when they were relatively short and included breaks, though it was equally important to ensure that sessions were paced to the needs of participants. Running pilot sessions helped some projects work out how much they could comfortably cover within sessions.

Spotlight: hiring people with lived experience to help media literacy content feel relatable

The Brain Charity aimed to support neurodivergent teenagers and adults who are carers or work in social care to better understand potential online dangers and how to keep themselves safe. They found early on that some young people did not see the sessions as relevant to them and needed to be convinced of their value. They identified hiring an autistic media literacy trainer to advertise, design and lead the workshops as critical to engagement and the success of tqhe project:

"Participants reported in focus groups that they thought they engaged much more with the material presented because [the lead facilitator] was able to approach the topics from a position of personal experience."

Evaluation of Safety Net: supporting people with neurological conditions to be online aware, April 2024

Ofcom's tips for Disabled people and people with learning disabilities

- Take time to understand the individual digital and media literacy and individual needs of participants to ensure person-centred support.
- Include people with lived experience within the project team to help design and deliver inclusive, accessible activities that feel relatable and relevant to participants.
- Use plain English and accessible formats such as Easy Read to advertise opportunities and avoid references to technical media literacy concepts.
- Provide one-to-one support to address barriers, such as fear, embarrassment about accessing support, or self-awareness about whether they could benefit from support or not.
- Deliver support within settings with which participants are familiar and have already built trusted relationships with staff and their peers.
- Keep media literacy sessions under an hour and avoid trying to cover too much content within a single session.
- Scope and provide practical support as part of delivery focused on parents and supporters of Disabled people and people with learning disabilities. For example, childcare support (e.g. running sessions for their child at the same time).

Media literacy evaluation insights

This report has set out the successes and challenges organisations faced in designing and delivering their media literacy projects. This section focuses on how they approached evaluation and draws out some key learning points.

Each of the commissioned organisations conducted a process evaluation – to understand how effective their approach was, and whether they needed to adapt to learnings during delivery or for future projects – and an impact evaluation – to understand whether their participants had improved media literacy skills as a result of the project. This work highlights four key themes.

Proportionate evaluation design

Most projects used pre and post surveys to measure the impact of their intervention, and did not compare results with a control group. This approach was proportional to their commissioned projects, and is typical for organisations in the charity and education sectors. Where there are limited opportunities to build in evaluation, it is critical to design evaluation tools carefully to ensure that they provide the most important information or feedback about the project. It also means that in order to genuinely understand what works in delivering media literacy activities, it will take a collective effort of sharing as many examples as possible in order to amplify key themes and issues.

Spotlight: asking open-ended survey questions to explore the 'how' and 'why'

Age UK East London aimed to support older adults to protect themselves from online scams and find energy and grocery deals online via a series of short, modular workshops. They chose to understand their impact through short, five-question surveys issued at the end of workshops – this felt proportionate to the length of activities delivered and reduced the risk of survey fatigue among participants who also used other services. However, while the survey helped them to measure changes in confidence and cross-reference with actual knowledge, it provided limited insights into these changes:

"In hindsight, the project surveys could possibly have been longer. [M]ore information from a longer survey, with also open-ended answer options would provide more detailed and informative data and feedback. [W]e could also have introduced an online survey that could have been used [as part of] their digital learning."

Age UK East London & Ofcom: media literacy project evaluation, April 2024

Outcomes and indicators design

Most projects found it challenging to articulate measurable outcomes and create high quality outcome indicators in the absence of media literacy-specific guides and resources. Where projects had a stronger focus on digital access and inclusion, the DSIT and DCMS Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit was a useful resource for developing indicators and measures. However, there was not an obvious equivalent for media literacy at the point at which the organisations were commissioned. As part of our wider media literacy programme, we developed and published a [media literacy evaluation toolkit](#) in February 2023 and delivered webinars to support organisations in using it. The toolkit will be continuously updated to support organisations delivering media literacy activities, with the intention of alleviating this challenge.

Subjective and objective assessment

Almost all projects were reliant on self-assessment evidence sources, and the organisations noted the risk of self-report bias in their reports. While some projects incorporated methods such as quizzes to objectively measure knowledge, many did not because of the time and resource investment required to design, test and refine them. For those that did, while it was indeed challenging to ensure the quiz questions were pitched at the right level, there were considerable benefits to doing so. In the example below, the realisation that the quiz was too easy resulted in the team being able to adapt the planned project activities to ensure they met the needs of the young people. It is also important to note that, while subjective reporting measures are not relevant for all metrics, they remain useful for measuring confidence in media literacy skills.

> **Spotlight: ensuring quiz questions are pitched at the right level to accurately assess ability**
>
> **Salford Foundation** aimed to equip young people aged 10 to 14 years with the media literacy skills to navigate the online world safely. The project adopted a mixed methods evaluation approach to understand their impact, including pre and post surveys and quizzes. Ensuring that data collection truly reflects changes in participants' behaviour or knowledge can be challenging, and the project noticed early on that the quantitative data were not in line with what they observed about participants or the feedback received from teachers and community workers:
>
> *"In the first term of the project, we re-evaluated the data collection methods, such as the pre-quiz questionnaire and post-survey. We observed […] that the quiz questionnaire was too easy, and some survey questions needed [greater] clarity, therefore these were adjusted for the remainder of the project."*
>
> ***Positive Action Project: Evaluation Report, April 2024***

Timelines

Within the delivery timeframe, few projects had the capacity or opportunity to go back to participants several months after delivery to measure intermediate to longer-term media literacy impacts, or the sustainability of short-term impacts. Where projects were able to go back to previous participants from early in their delivery timeline, they also struggled to re-contact them after project activities ended. To contribute to our understanding of what works in media literacy, it would be valuable to test organisations' initial hypotheses about whether or not their activities contribute to longer-term impacts, and also for them to identify the feasibility of recontacting participants and finding mitigations for this type of contact.

> **Spotlight: collecting key data during project delivery**
>
> **West Nottinghamshire College** aimed to improve the media literacy knowledge, skills and confidence of older adults and people from disadvantaged backgrounds and support them in the use of online applications to access local services. Their evaluation methodology included follow-up phone calls with participants 2-3 months after the intervention, however they struggled to recontact participants without providing an incentive after the training ended:
>
> *"Once the participant was no longer engaged in the training there was no incentive for them to complete surveys or answer calls for feedback and some outputs were lost because of this. [In future we should] ensure all data is captured whilst the learner is on the programme."*
>
> ***Demystifying Digital: project evaluation report, April 2024***

Ofcom's tips for evaluating media literacy

- Use existing resources to help you choose outcomes, indicators and measures for your project and its evaluation. Useful examples include Ofcom's Media Literacy Outcomes Bank.
- Prioritise only the most important outcomes for measurement to ensure your evaluation stays proportionate to your project size. This might be outcomes that are important to your organisation or a funder, that you are less confident in, or ones that are crucial to 'unlocking' longer-term outcomes.
- Use a combination of subjective and objective measures to understand to whether people's knowledge and abilities have improved, in addition to their own perception of them. For example, you can test people's knowledge levels through quizzes, or whether people can apply new skills in practice through observation.
- Test your data collection tools with the participants to ensure questions are easy to understand, appropriately worded, pitched at the right level, and how long they take to complete.
- Ask participants at the end of your project whether you can contact them in the future to understand what has changed for them in the longer-term as a result of your media literacy activities. Incentives, such as entry into a prize draw for vouchers, can be useful to boost response rates.
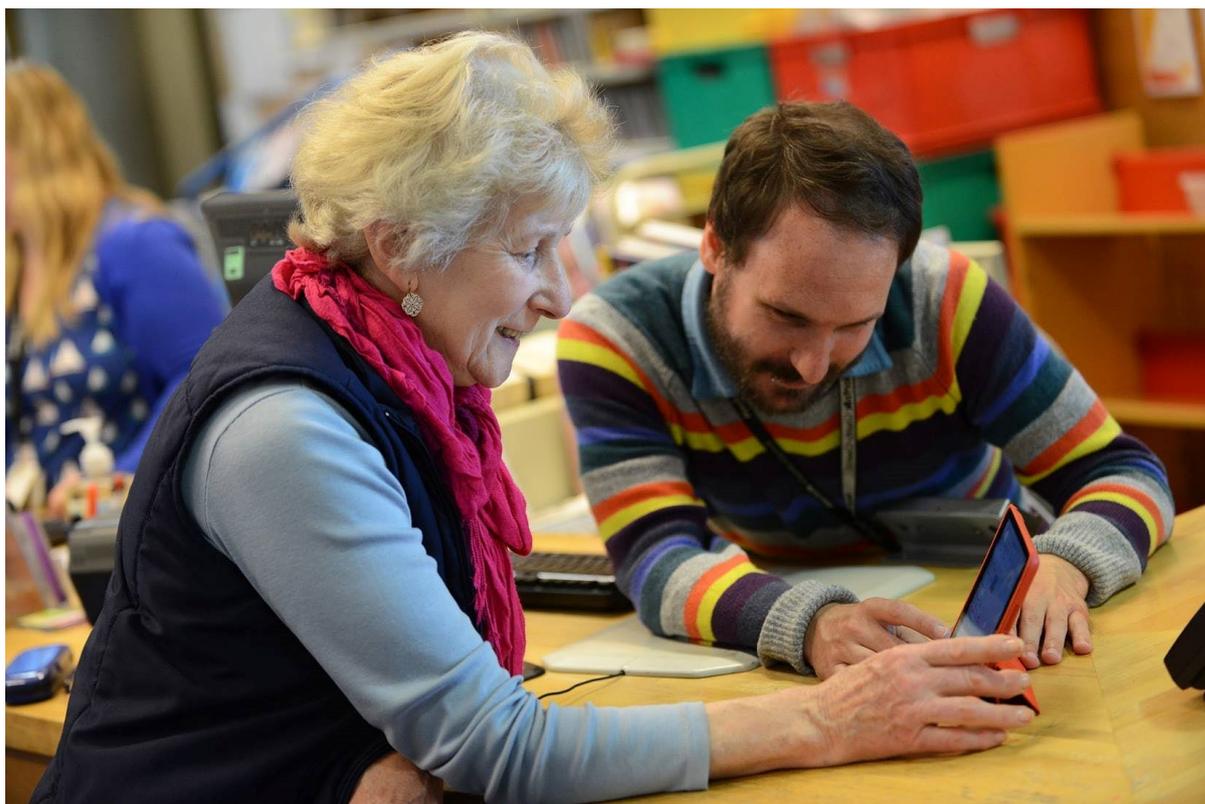
Conclusions and recommendations

These projects have generated insights and lessons that will be of use to delivery organisations supporting target groups, and media literacy practitioners seeking to understand what approaches work in different contexts and settings.

This report draws together evidence and learning across the projects, identifying cross-cutting themes, what worked well and challenges in media literacy interventions. The differences in starting point, approach and learnings highlight the importance of meeting people where they are when delivering media literacy activities.

Key cross-cutting insights focused on the importance of testing early assumptions about a target group's media literacy needs and interests; effective engagement methods; the benefits of co-design and piloting media literacy interventions; the benefits of different support models and tailored, person-centred activity design; and the importance of delivering, or linking to, follow-up support.

It is clear that evaluating media literacy activities is essential in contributing to our shared understanding of what works.

Recommendations for organisations delivering media literacy interventions

1: Prioritise outreach and engagement plans

Delivery organisations should expect some resistance to media literacy interventions. and anticipate its impact on recruitment and engagement – even where services are offered for free. For this reason, outreach and engagement plans are as important to successful delivery as planning an intervention's activities – from identifying a 'hook' that is closely linked to a target group's needs or interests (the term "media literacy" is highly unlikely to be successful for this purpose), to working with people with lived experience and through trusted community partners.

2: Consider and build in appropriate digital literacy support if needed

Many groups also experience significant barriers in terms of digital access and inclusion. Organisations focusing on other areas of media literacy (for example, critical thinking about content) should anticipate this and ensure that appropriate support is in place to first 'meet people where they are at' – from offering one-to-one support sessions, to device and resource provision. This means that providing media literacy support virtually is unlikely to be successful in the first instance.

3: Pilot planned activities with target group representatives

Levels of media literacy knowledge and confidence can vary significantly between members of the same target group, based on previous experiences or support received. Projects should always seek to pilot planned activities with representatives of their target group to ensure media literacy content

is relevant and pitched at the right level, or face having to make changes in light of experience at a later point when engagement or outcomes fall short of expectations. There is no 'one size fits all' approach for media literacy.

Recommendations for organisations commissioning or funding media literacy interventions

4: Structure application forms to support robust situation analysis

Media literacy challenges and root causes are complex and interrelated. Commissioners should consider structuring application forms to encourage applicants to ensure a good understanding of the problem faced by target groups to help identify the best course of action. For example, a guided situation analysis that asks for brief details of challenges, root causes and consequences, barriers to change, existing provision and gaps.

While application forms need to be proportional to the programmes and size/capacity of organisations applying, projects will benefit from having done this crucial thinking up front, and commissioners will be in a better position to judge the merits of proposals. Striking this balance is key.

5: Be realistic about potential outcomes, and support organisations to plan with this in mind

Commissioners need to be realistic about what outcomes it is possible to expect from time-limited interventions, both in terms of interventions with limited participant contact time and what outcomes can be measured in projects that last less than a year. Commissioners may want to note where projects are being overly ambitious, and work with them to develop more realistic outcomes.

6: Design commissioning timelines with enough time before and after delivery

To deliver an effective intervention, delivery organisations need enough time after funding is awarded to sense check their project design within local contexts, build relationships and agreements with any delivery partners, and develop evaluation frameworks and related data collection tools, well in advance of expected delivery. Following delivery, to be sure that the intervention has had the intended impact, a follow up evaluation weeks or months after the end of the intervention will be more insightful than an immediate post-survey. While this sounds obvious, it is all too rare that enough planning and evaluation time is built into delivery timelines.

A1 Evaluation support

Ofcom asked commissioned projects to evaluate their interventions against two aims: to understand what impact was made to target groups (or not); and to capture learning about effective ways to deliver media literacy interventions.

Importantly, projects were encouraged to openly reflect on any challenges they faced in the design, delivery and evaluation of their projects, and to highlight lessons that could help other organisations planning to deliver interventions for target groups.

Ofcom provided a range of evaluation support to commissioned organisations, including:

- one-to-one advice and guidance from two evaluation advisers (the authors of this report)

- attendance at two Learning and Sharing Days (in March and September 2023) consisting of peer-to-peer support, networking and practical workshops led by the evaluation advisers

- a set of Evaluation FAQs drafted by the evaluation advisers in response to feedback at the first Learning and Sharing Day (see Appendix 1)

- the Ofcom Evaluation Toolkit (published separately), which projects were encouraged to use

- a series of three webinars accompanying the Ofcom Evaluation Toolkit, led by the evaluation advisers (which were also available to other invited organisations, to promote wider adoption of the Toolkit)

The projects also provided an opportunity for early user testing of the Ofcom Evaluation Toolkit, which was revised and updated in light of feedback in November 2023.

This report does not include reflections on the efficacy of evaluation guidance and support provided to commissioned organisations as this would represent a conflict of interest.

A2 Overview of impact Key Evaluation Questions

Children & young people

Guardian Foundation

- Do community educators have the skills and confidence to deliver further sessions in their community?

Salford Foundation

- Were participants better able to identify reliable online content by the end of the project?
- Did participants have a better understanding which has improved their behaviour online?

Praesidio Safeguarding

- Were participants better able to identify persuasive design technologies and the ways in this shaped their online experiences?
- If they are better able to understand and identify persuasive design strategies and how their content, interactions are formed through these, does this actually change their online habits – or make them more likely to resist these technologies?

ProMo Cymru

- Were young people better able to understand and shape their online space? / take control of their online space?
- To what extent have the interventions improved young people's critical understanding of algorithms?
- How have young people applied the skills they learned through the project in their everyday lives?
- How has the project improved the way professionals working with young people understand algorithms?
- How are these professionals better able to support young people's critical thinking skills through the use of appropriate resources/interventions?

Older adults

Red Chair Highland

- Are the older adults who have received a device and set-up support using the device confidently?

AgeUK East London

- How did clients change their habits in shopping online?

Advice NI

- To what extent do participants feel more confident in using online tools?
- To what extent do participants feel more equipped to protect their online safety?
- To what extent are participants more likely to be able to identify reliable online content?

Norfolk Libraries

- Did we succeed in achieving the projects objectives – with a high number (50%+) of participants reporting increased confidence in the areas in which we offered support?
- A 'side outcome' of the project was encouraging people to use online to keep in touch to ease social isolation. To what extent was this aim achieved?

West Notts College

- Do participants feel more confident and able?

Disabled people and people with learning disabilities

AbilityNet

- Were residents better able to use their tech and undertake tasks online?
- Were residents more knowledgeable and confident to identify scams and misinformation online?
- Were staff more knowledgeable and confident about digital skills, accessibility and scams?
- Were volunteers active, engaged and confident in supporting residents?

The Brain Charity

- Did participants feel more confident accessing online content by the end of the project?
- Did participants feel safer online at the end of the project?

Mencap Liverpool & Sefton

- Has the project increased individuals' ability to recognise misleading or harmful content online(e.g., cams/fraud/misinformation/disinformation)?
- Do individuals feel more confident making decisions/be safer online?

Mencap NI

- Were young people we engaged in the project able to navigate online spaces safely?
- How effective has the project been in encouraging parents to support their young people to be active in online spaces?

A3 Overview of process Key Evaluation Questions

Table C1: Areas addressed by process KEQs overview

	Target group	Target group needs	Reach	Engagement	Delivery model/ methods	Effectiveness	Adaptability	Sustainability	Partnerships and collaboration
Guardian Foundation	Children and young people				Yes				
Salford Foundation	Children and young people			Yes		Yes			
Mencap NI	Young people with learning disabilities				Yes		Yes		
Praesidio	Children and young people			Yes		Yes			
ProMo Cymru	Children and young people				Yes				
West Notts College	Older adults	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes	
Red Chair Highland	Older adults			Yes	Yes	Yes			
AgeUK East London	Older adults			Yes	Yes	Yes			
Advice NI	Older adults			Yes		Yes			
Norfolk Libraries	Older adults		Yes	Yes	Yes				
AbilityNet	Disabled people and people with cognitive impairments, staff and volunteers			Yes				Yes	Yes
The Brain Charity	People with neurological conditions			Yes		Yes			
Mencap Liverpool & Sefton	People with learning disabilities	Yes			Yes	Yes			

Children & young people

Guardian Foundation

- What are the key differences between delivery of NewsWise in schools and community locations?

Salford Foundation

- What did we learn about effective ways to help young people to spot misleading information online?
- What did we learn for the future about effective ways to approach and educate children about these issues in a way that is engaging, and which connects with their experiences?

Praesidio Safeguarding

- How well did the toolkit, the ways the session was run, and the exercises and tasks keep children interested, engaged and motivated?
- What did we learn for the future about effective ways to approach and educate children about these issues in a way that is engaging, and which connects with their experiences?
- What other lessons can we take forward to improve our work with young people in future?

ProMo Cymru

- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the interventions' design and implementation, and what could be done to improve future projects?
- What did we learn were the most effective methods of keeping young people engaged throughout the duration of the project?
- What other lessons can we take forward to improve our work with young people in the future?
- How has the co-design method impacted the outcomes of the project?

Older adults

Red Chair Highland

- Is face-to-face support effective in helping older adults gain digital confidence and digital skills?
- Are community based drop-in sessions effective in engaging older adults in digital activities?
- How successful were group workshops in supporting older adults to be safer online consumers?

AgeUK East London

- How successful was the project at engaging with clients who have experienced scams?
- Which training method is more impactful for our clients?
- What are the biggest challenges?
- What other lessons can we take from this project to improve on our current work?

Advice NI

- How successful has the project been in engaging older people experiencing disadvantage?
- How successful has the project been in increasing participants financial wellbeing?

Norfolk Libraries

- Does digital support work better in some places rather than others – did we get the engagement we anticipated in the locations we chose?
- Was the project successful in attracting older men?
- What element of the project did we get the most demand for – online, safe or in control?

West Nottinghamshire College

- What parts of the project could we develop further (e.g. courses)?
- Was the delivery method effective? What could we improve?
- What did we learn about this demographic's needs?

Disabled people and people with learning disabilities

AbilityNet

- How successful were we in engaging with older and disabled people at all 5 villages? (What did we learn and change from the pilot?)
- How successful was the working relationship with Extracare?
- What lessons did we learn for future digital inclusion projects and partnership work?

The Brain Charity

- How successful was the project in engaging carers across Liverpool?
- What did we learn were the most effective methods of helping people with neurological conditions identify harmful content online?
- What did we learn were the most effective methods of keeping participants engaged throughout the duration of the project?

Mencap Liverpool & Sefton

- How successful was user-led way of working & what did we learn? (co-production, co-design and employment of Digital Champion, balanced group approach)
- How has co-produced method impacted outcomes?
- What did we learn were the most effective methods to achieve this?
- How did we share and sustain our learnings?
- How has employment of Digital Champion w/LD impacted?
- How have we balanced everyone's ideas/wants/needs if conflicting with members of the group (so everyone is valued equally)?

Mencap NI

- What did we learn about using youth work methods to deliver media literacy learning to young people with a learning disability?
- How adaptable has our resource/toolkit been for working with young people with a learning disability?

A4 Sources of evidence

This report draws upon a range of evidence sources, including:

- a review of project and evaluation planning documents

- mapping Initiate project outcomes to inform development of an outcomes bank resource for users of the Ofcom Evaluation Toolkit (published separately)

- regular one-to-one catch-up meetings between project teams and evaluation advisers

- feedback and insights generated at Learning and Sharing days

- interviews with projects conducted by the evaluation advisers

- a review of final reports and other deliverables submitted to Ofcom by the projects in March and April 2024