

**Evaluation of *Behind
the Headlines*
Media Literacy
Ambassador
project**

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Working with

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Introduction

Advances in digital technology have changed how media and news are created and experienced. Alongside this, there has been a growing recognition of the need to strengthen resilience to mis- and disinformation, acknowledging their potential to threaten democracy and children and young people's wellbeing. As their cognitive capacities are still developing, teenagers may have greater susceptibility to mis- and disinformation than older age groups (see, e.g., Jolley et al., 2022) while also having limited access to the learning experiences needed to develop the knowledge and skills to engage effectively with the media (Cannon et al., 2022).

Behind the Headlines aims to empower young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to critically analyse news and develop resilience to mis- and disinformation.

The Behind the Headlines Media Literacy Ambassador project

The Behind the Headlines Media Literacy Ambassador project, run by the Guardian Foundation, aims to empower young people aged 14 to 18 with the knowledge, skills and confidence to critically analyse media and news and recognise mis- and disinformation. Targeted in schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage in the Midlands, Greater Manchester, and West and South Yorkshire, the project combines direct and peer-to-peer-based learning to support young people's media literacy. Commissioned by the Department of Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) Media Literacy Programme, it addresses the key skills and knowledge outlined in Principle 3 on the DSIT Online Media Strategy: 'Users should understand how different content is created and be able to critically analyse content they consume.'

Participating schools receive professionally delivered workshops, teacher training, high-quality resources and ongoing virtual support to train students as 'Media Literacy Ambassadors' (MLAs), who then co-design and co-deliver media literacy

sessions to fellow students. This approach aims to maximise the reach of the project, consolidate students' learning by supporting them to teach others about media and news literacy, and increase the relevance of sessions to young people by involving their peers. Teachers and students were consulted at every stage of the project to support iterative improvements to delivery, content and evaluation and ensure young people's voices and experiences were represented throughout.

This evaluation of the project was conducted by the National Literacy Trust. The report focuses on data from 28 schools that took part in the project during 2023 and 2024 and includes findings from quizzes, surveys, youth panels and interviews with teachers. This is followed by reflections on what has been learned and how this might inform future iterations of the project and others working to support media and news literacy in young people.

Key findings

1: The Media Literacy Ambassador project improved media and news literacy skills in the young people it worked with.

More participating than non-participating students were able to identify reliable and unreliable news stories correctly after taking part.

To assess whether the project helped students to better identify features of reliable and unreliable news, students were asked to identify three news items as either real or fake before and after a media literacy workshop. Based on matched¹ samples of participating (n = 364) and non-participating (n = 87) students:

- The percentage of participating students able to identify two of three items correctly as real or fake increased from **2 in 5** (39.9%) before to **7 in 10** (68.5%) after the workshop, an increase of 28.6 percentage points (pp).

The percentage of students able to identify two of three news items correctly as real or fake increased from **2 in 5 (40%)** before to **7 in 10 (69%)** after the project.

¹ Students were matched by initials and birth month

- In a smaller comparison group, the percentage of non-participating students able to identify two of three items correctly also increased (from 37.9% to 56.3%). However, the percentage-point increase (18.4pp) was 10.2pp lower than that observed in the participating group.
- More than 4 in 5 (81.5%) participating students were able to identify both of two examples of misinformation and disinformation correctly following the workshop.

These findings indicate that more participating than non-participating students were able to demonstrate an increased ability to identify reliable and unreliable news correctly after taking part.

2: The peer-to-peer model supported reach, consolidated learning and provided engaging and relevant sessions when co-delivered to students.

Media Literacy Ambassadors (MLAs) reported stronger media and news literacy skills after co-delivering sessions to peers.

Participating students were trained as Media Literacy Ambassadors and co-designed and co-delivered media literacy sessions to fellow students.

- Most MLAs felt that co-delivering sessions had reinforced their earlier learning. 9 in 10 (90.3%) felt more confident about recognising mis- and disinformation and 9 in 10 (88.0%) felt that they had increased skills in thinking critically about news stories. In the words of one student, this related to "... the need to understand what you're doing before you can teach others".
- Many MLAs felt they had helped other students learn about media and news literacy in a relevant (88.3%) and engaging (81.9%) way. One MLA explained, "When delivering to our peers, I heard comments about how fun and relatable it was and how they could connect it to daily life. It was fun and effective."
- In addition, 3 in 4 MLAs felt they had increased their presentation (76.7%) and communication skills (75.2%), suggesting the experience had also supported students in developing transferable skills likely to be important in the workplace. Many also commented on the benefits of working as a team to teach other students about media literacy, with one student explaining that "doing it in a group... It's someone to fall back on if you get a bit stuck."

Students receiving sessions by MLAs found them engaging and reported positive outcomes in relation to media and news literacy knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and confidence.

- Students receiving sessions co-delivered by MLAs were typically in younger age groups. They reported finding sessions engaging and relevant, with comments including: “Really immersive, activities were great, had fun while learning” and “They explained a lot... and made me feel more interested in that sort of thing.”
- While students receiving co-delivered workshops had lower starting and ending points in relation to outcomes linked with media literacy knowledge and behaviour, percentage-point increases were, in most cases, broadly similar to those seen in MLA students involved in the initial workshops.
- Teachers’ comments highlighted student engagement in the co-delivered sessions, as well as the wider confidence, teamwork and leadership benefits:

The students have loved being part of the project. They have built their confidence [and] become more critical in their consumption of news. They feel proud to be part of the project.

Overall, findings suggest that co-delivered workshops were effective in supporting students to learn techniques for evaluating the reliability of news and had a positive impact on media and news literacy attitudes and confidence.

3: Qualitative data provided insights into areas for improvement and suggested the MLA programme was a sustainable approach to supporting young people’s media and news literacy.

Teacher surveys and interviews highlighted that the project complemented the curriculum, ensured sessions were relevant, increased reach and offered a sustainable approach to supporting media and news literacy.

- Of teachers answering questions about the MLA approach, almost all believed the peer-supported approach to be effective in reaching and engaging students (18 of 21) and said they would like to use the approach to support media and news literacy projects in their school in future (19 of 22).

- Teacher interviews provided further insight into experiences of the project, with themes emerging including the project reinforcing and complementing the curriculum, giving students a sense of ownership in their learning, having visible longer-term impacts on students' skills and behaviours, and sustainability.
- Comments included: "It's good for the students they're engaging with because they understand the way that they consume information and news more. They've rolled out to a lot more students rather than one teacher delivering it. We reached about 150 students." and "Their ability to look at local, national news stories, reporters' research skills, fact-checking was massive. They might have read something and thought, 'I don't really know [if it's trustworthy],' but now they think, 'I'm going to find out.' That's brilliant."

I would say this is, probably, in my 15 years of teaching, the most positive thing I've seen in terms of student impact.

4: Initial findings on longer-term impact.

Following the first year of delivery (2022-23), 4 schools were revisited in 2023-24 and received refresher training. Initial findings suggest the project can have a powerful longer-term impact on students' engagement with media and news, helping students to feel empowered in their interactions. Comments from students included:

I am more open to news and media because I trust that now I can fact-check sources and news. I used to avoid most news altogether because I didn't know what was true and what wasn't.

This comment clearly illustrates some of the most important implications of the project, including the disempowering nature of mis- and disinformation and the positive impact of providing young people with the knowledge, confidence and skills to evaluate the reliability of media and news. This was further emphasised in teachers' comments on the longer-term impact, both on engagement and in providing role models to future Media Literacy Ambassadors:

Impact for our students is significant. In terms of critical engagement with news, this has been the most profound impact. Students who have a wider knowledge of legitimate news journalism now regularly tell us that they have been reading the news from apps they have downloaded.

I think the second year has been hugely valuable. It has enabled us to use previous ambassadors to inspire others. This year's MLAs wish to emulate their peers. It has allowed the programme to grow the ambassador programme to other programmes and sites.

What has been learned from project delivery and evaluation?

Teachers and students expressed high levels of interest, enthusiasm and engagement in participating in the project. The final project numbers for both ambassadors trained and the students they co-delivered to exceeded the initial target numbers. Some schools and colleges selected ambassadors from existing classes of up to 30 students. In contrast, others created a mixed group of students and implemented the programme across a whole year group despite the exceptionally busy school year.

Research suggests that school-based media literacy interventions can have a positive impact on young people's ability to engage critically with news and information (Werner Axelsson & Nygren, 2024; Brodsky et al., 2023; Wineberg et al., 2022). However, the potential for such interventions to be delivered at scale may be limited, calling for creative project designs that also consider reach and sustainability. In addition, there have been calls for more rigorous evaluation and clearer identification of the mechanisms of effective interventions (DCMS, 2021, Edwards et al., 2021). To date, few studies have explored the benefits of involving young people in supporting each other's media and news literacy. We hope this report will make a useful contribution to the research in this area.

Findings from this evaluation of the *Behind the Headlines* Media Literacy Ambassador project show that taking part appeared to increase students' media and news literacy skills to a greater degree than in a comparison group. Survey responses also suggested improvements in media and news literacy knowledge,

behaviour and confidence, and these improvements were also observed in students receiving co-delivered workshops from students trained as Media Literacy Ambassadors. Feedback from students and teachers suggested that this innovative peer-to-peer model, involving young people in co-creating and delivering media literacy workshops to fellow students, was widely felt to be a successful and sustainable approach to supporting media and news literacy in secondary settings. Qualitative data emphasised the benefits of the approach for reinforcing media literacy learning, encouraging and supporting less-confident students and ensuring sessions were relevant and engaging for young people.

Teachers and students engaged with pre- and post-delivery sessions and welcomed the chance to discuss and share learnings about the process in our virtual sessions. Input from teachers and young people played a critical role in the development of the project. By creating intentional opportunities for teacher and youth panels, the project team was able to seek feedback and insight in key areas including resources, delivery, evaluation and how to maintain and extend the role of the ambassadors beyond the initial intervention and peer delivery sessions.

Youth panels provided helpful insights into the mechanisms of peer support, such as greater familiarity with the media experiences of young people and different teaching dynamics. Teacher interviews highlighted how the project supported and complemented the curriculum and the essential role of high-quality resources, training and support in making students feel comfortable with their roles as MLAs. Practitioners and students in SEND settings provided further essential feedback on delivering successful projects through flexible resources and evaluation.

Challenges experienced were common to most interventions delivered in busy school and college settings. Effective and consistent communication with participating schools and colleges was essential, and this extended beyond the initial training delivered by the project team. Attrition was built into the planning of the project and some schools interested in taking part in the project were not enrolled as it was felt they could not commit to the whole process including peer delivery. A key reflection is around the need for a consistent contact person in the school setting, with some confusion around evaluation requirements when multiple staff were involved and two projects not continuing when key contacts left. Some schools felt the time commitments could be difficult to manage, while some students asked for more time to prepare their sessions. Managing student behaviour in co-delivered classes presented an issue in very few schools but this may be an area for improvement in future iterations of the project.

Whole school/college buy-in was another factor to consider, with the project working best when the lead teacher can work with a team of colleagues within a department and have the support of Senior Leadership.

The two showcase events held during the project at Birmingham City University and the University of Manchester played an important role in recognising the ambassadors' achievements, developing ambition and inspiring them about higher education and media careers, as well as giving them ideas and support to continue with their role within their organisation.

Post-project resources and support helped take the project beyond the scope of initial peer delivery and reflected the high levels of engagement with the project. Ambassadors in some organisations delivered to additional groups on different subjects, designed posters, created fact-checking campaigns, made films and podcasts, and produced exhibitions and corridor banners. Learning from delivery of the project has fed into the design of the summative teacher guide. It aims to support scaling peer learning along with associated media literacy resources so that any school or college can implement some aspects of the project independently.

What changes would be made to the project in future?

Delivery

Whilst all participating schools were able to arrange two 90-minute 'Fake or For Real' workshops and ambassador training, peer delivery sessions had to fit in within timetabled lessons that varied in length across organisations. Some sessions were delivered over two 40-minute sessions and some across an hour. We were able to support this flexibility by signalling what activities were optional and which could be set as homework activities. Such flexibility will be built into further iterations of the project.

Teacher training is essential in ensuring the success of the project because they provide pivotal support to the ambassadors, so it was built into the day the team spent in each organisation. It worked well when it involved more than just the project lead and included the teachers who would be involved in the co-delivery sessions with the ambassadors. A few organisations did not take part in project training as timetabling did not allow staff to be present. Going forward, training

would be a compulsory element that could be delivered virtually prior to the onsite sessions. We would also look at providing an introductory video briefing. These enhancements could serve as an effective recruitment filter for those not fully engaged, as well as making the process simpler and less labour intensive by allowing teachers to be trained through a virtual session each term. The teacher guide will also support this.

Where organisations and teachers took the project beyond its initial scope, they started to advocate for the model and approach, sharing ideas and resources with other organisations. Going forward, the project will develop teacher champions to support other organisations to deliver the programme independently and help exchange best practice.

The programme was delivered across a number of subjects, including English, Media, PSHE, Citizenship, Business Studies, History and tutorial time. The communication subject links and competencies could be emphasised further to enhance its attractiveness to schools. Media literacy is not a curriculum subject or mandatory, which meant that, in some cases, Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) in schools did not allow a teacher or department to take up the programme during an exceptionally busy year. We are developing resources that can engage SLT and highlight the benefits and impact of the project, communicating the necessity of developing critical analysis and resilience to mis- and disinformation.

Students from Year 9 to Year 13 trained as ambassadors. With sixth-form students, the programme worked better than with GCSE Plus and vocational students. In a couple of colleges, the responsibility was passed on from the original lead and ran across multiple subjects with different teachers. This led to difficulties tracking progress after the initial intervention due to the absence of a single point of contact who had oversight of delivery across the organisation.

Delivery of the programme is dependent on students having access to technology to carry out research and fact-checking, and also in terms of adapting the slide deck that ambassadors delivered to their peers. This proved to be a problem for some schools and it was also an issue for survey completion.

Evaluation

Two new validated measures of misinformation susceptibility in adults and primary-school aged children were published at the end of the project delivery period (see Maertens et al., 2023 and Harrison et al. 2024). However, as well as not being

available in time, neither measure would not have been suitable to use with adolescents (although the short quiz used in this project was designed with similar principles in mind, see 'Evaluation methodology, p.15). Performance tests suitable for this age group remain scarce, presenting an ongoing challenge for those seeking to measure media literacy or assess the impact of an intervention on young people. Academic studies in this area should be closely monitored to incorporate any new assessments that may arise. Alternatively, bearing in mind time and cost implications, future evaluations may consider incorporating a piloting, testing and reflection period to create validated measures suitable for secondary students.

In addition, the evaluation was designed to focus on the impact of the project on young people's media and news literacy, and (at this stage) did not seek to compare the MLA approach with another delivery model or (beyond the small comparison group) a business-as-usual approach. Future evaluations may seek to compare outcomes for the MLA approach with alternative interventions. Future studies could also include observations to identify which practices in co-delivery are most impactful or where more support is needed. They could also include pre- and post-tests for co-delivered workshops (this was felt to be burdensome in the initial study when schools already completed a lot of evaluation).

While designed to be engaging and accessible, feedback from youth panels suggested that, even with adjustments, some students found surveys too long and some vocabulary difficult. In addition, while youth panel participants felt online surveys might help some students feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts, they recommended that future evaluations should include more discussions co-delivered to students ("*Casual conversations are good for us to see what they have learned.*"). Future online evaluation could be streamlined, and selected themes addressed in youth panels or discussions.

Notably, when schools and young people chose to explore the impact of the project themselves, this usually involved multimedia methods such as short films, blogs and Padlets (digital presentation boards), and consideration should be given to including these forms of evaluation in any future framework. Equally, some teachers expressed a wish for evaluation to be shared more directly with schools (for example, through an online open-access platform such as Google or Microsoft forms) and for links between media and news literacy and traditional literacy skills (such as comprehension, inference, authorial intention and writing quality) to be made more explicit.

Recommendations to others supporting young people's media and news literacy

The *Behind the Headlines* Media Literacy Ambassadors project has provided valuable insights into the effective provision of media literacy support for young people. To build on the findings above, recommendations to secondary schools and other organisations seeking to improve media and news literacy include:

1. Findings appear to indicate that the Media Literacy Ambassador approach could be an effective way to support media literacy.

- Involving young people in supporting their peers can have a variety of positive impacts for students and those they co-deliver to, including embedding learning and increasing relevance and engagement.
- An initial workshop is essential for providing a strong foundation for later delivery, and students need training and support throughout to ensure co-delivered sessions are effective.
- High-quality expert-produced resources are welcomed by busy teachers.

2. The peer-to-peer model supports greater reach, embeds learning and has a positive impact on transferable skills, particularly for less-confident students.

- Teachers reported students delivering sessions across year groups, schools and campuses, sometimes reaching hundreds of their peers across a project year and ensuring students across the school had the opportunity to increase their media and news literacy skills and knowledge.
- Having to teach other students helped to embed learning in the MLA group.
- Perhaps surprisingly, teachers often reported a positive impact on their least confident or engaged students, particularly in relation to developing teamwork and communication skills.

3. Project design and evaluation should involve input from teachers and centre young people's voices.

- Efforts to understand and elevate the perspectives of those participating in the intervention resulted in more effective and relevant delivery.
- Teacher panels provided the project delivery team with invaluable information about the acceptability and feasibility of project elements.
- Similarly, insights from surveys and youth panels provided helpful information around young people's media and news environments along with useful suggestions for improvements to delivery and evaluation.

- For example, some found surveys onerous and preferred discussions, while others produced films, blogs and articles relating to their experience of the project. The need for larger-scale impact data should be balanced with opportunities for more creative/multi-media responses to the project.
- Input gathered through consulting teachers and young people was crucial to the success of the project. This was recognised and enabled by providing cover costs for teachers and vouchers for students.
- On a practical note, including identifiers in surveys required attention to GDPR regulations, but ensured findings were as accurate as possible.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was developed with the Ofcom definition of media literacy in mind (“the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts”²), and there was a focus on the ability to “question, analyse, appreciate and evaluate [those communications]” (Ofcom, 2004). It was informed by a narrative review of the literature to ensure a thorough but flexible approach (Sukhera, 2022) to gathering information from studies relating to media literacy in young people.

Research questions informing the review focused on definitions, measures and assessments of media, news, and critical and digital literacy, particularly in adolescents, as well as young people’s experiences of mis- and disinformation and peer-to-peer approaches to supporting young people’s learning. An initial search included websites and databases such as Academia, ERIC, Google Scholar, ResearchGate and SCOPUS. Search terms were based on keywords relating to the research questions and included “media”, “news”, “literacy”, “assessment”, “evaluation”, “adolescents/young people” and “mis/disinformation”. The review focused on the most recent studies (2018–2023) but was not restricted to peer-reviewed articles to enable relevant third-sector evaluations to be included. Papers were screened for relevance to the programme and evaluation, with limited further material accessed from reference lists. Inclusion criteria consisted of material relating to measuring media and news literacy, participants in the adolescent age group, and recent publications.

² <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research>

Emphasis was placed on studies including methods of measuring news and media literacy in young people, with measures adapted or constructed to increase relevance to this project (including from Helsper et al., 2021; Nygren & Guarth, 2021 and Ofcom, 2022). However, validated performance tests for assessing young people's abilities to evaluate media and news items are rare, and establishing a new set was outside the scope of this evaluation. At the same time, skills involved in news literacy are relatively well-researched and include the ability to critically evaluate the credibility of sources and news stories, and to distinguish between reliable news and mis- and disinformation (see, e.g., Edwards et al., 2021 and Potter, 2022).

Studies also emphasise the practical application of news literacy and news literacy behaviours (NLBs), including news consumption, content verification and identification of misinformation (see, e.g., Vraga et al., 2021), and value for media literacy (Tamboer et al., 2022). Key findings from the review were shared with the programme team as part of consultations relating to the Theory of Change (see Appendix 1) and the development of the evaluation framework, during which the following outcomes were determined:

Short-term outcomes:

- Educators have increased knowledge, skills and confidence to support and engage young people in media and news literacy.
- Young people have increased confidence, knowledge and skills to critically engage with and analyse news and media (e.g. lateral reading, source verification).
- Young people co-create resources and co-deliver sessions to peers, developing presentation, communication and leadership skills.

Medium- to long-term outcomes:

- Young people increasingly consider the extent to which news and content is trustworthy.
- Young people feel confident to question mis/disinformation and to share credible news.
- Peer-supported media and news literacy approaches become embedded in settings.
- Young people have increased resilience to mis/disinformation, trust in media and civic engagement.

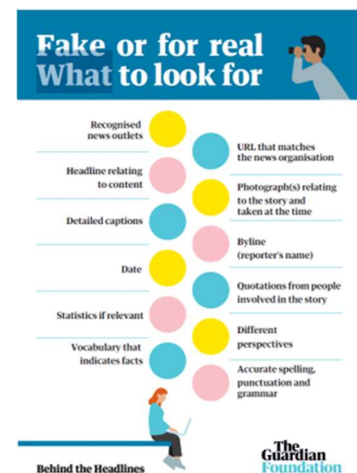
A mixed methods approach was used to determine the extent to which objectives were reached. This included quantitative methods such as pre- and post-project quizzes designed to test ability to identify features of reliable and unreliable news (for example, brand/source, presence of date and author, photo credits, language and spelling, URL). To establish the ability to identify both reliable and unreliable items, rather than focus on identifying unreliable items alone, correct identification of two or three items was counted at each survey point. These were complemented by student self-report surveys and teacher-feedback forms. Throughout the project, further insights into students' experiences and opinions were gathered through regular youth panels and semi-structured teacher interviews.

Project overview

The intervention aims to enable young people develop the understanding, confidence and skills to critically analyse news and develop resilience to mis- and disinformation by:

- Helping teachers gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to support young people in developing their media literacy within their organisation.
- Running an initial 'Fake or For Real' workshop covering aspects of news media literacy including trustworthy sources, 'horizontal research'³, features of trustworthy content, the '5 Ws'⁴, images, captions, and fact and opinion.
- Supporting young people to co-create and co-deliver one or more media literacy sessions to their peers, further developing their news media literacy skills as well as leadership and communication competences.

Resources included presentations, posters, check sheets, bookmarks and checklists (see right for example) and certificates, with regular showcase events celebrating students' achievements.



Outputs

³ See, e.g., Wineburg et al. (2022)

⁴ Who is the story about? What is the story about? Where did the story happen? When did the story take place? Why and how did it happen?

Between January 2023 and March 2024, the pilot and main phases of the *Behind the Headlines* Media Literacy Ambassadors project reached 31 schools and colleges in the Midlands, Manchester, and South and West Yorkshire (locations indicated on map below), including two settings for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)⁵. A total of 86 teachers⁶ took part, 807 students were trained as Media Literacy Ambassadors, and 3,742 students were reached in co-delivered sessions, with 4,549 students taking part in total⁷.



Initial intervention provided to schools and colleges:

1. Media literacy workshop (90 minutes)
2. Ambassadors' training session on how to co-deliver media literacy training (90 minutes)
3. Teacher training on how to support students with peer delivery (30 minutes)

Next steps:

4. Pre-delivery virtual check-in with GF team with ambassadors and teacher (30 minutes)
5. Ambassadors deliver 'Fake or For Real' (media literacy) session (supported by their teachers) to other groups
6. Post-delivery virtual reflection and ideas for next steps (45 minutes)
7. Ambassador showcases to celebrate the achievements of the ambassadors.⁸

⁵ Including four that took part in redelivery sessions in the second year of the project. Data in this report relates to 28 schools as several were still in the process of delivery at the time of writing.

⁶ Involved in onsite sessions with students/trained or may, for example, have observed co-delivered workshops.

⁷ Total young people either participating as Media Literacy Ambassadors or through peer-delivered workshops.

⁸ These were held at Birmingham City University (July 2023) and the University of Manchester (November 2023)

Throughout the project there were regular panel discussions with teachers and young people covering topics including feedback on the delivery of the project, the teacher guide, and useful resources and independent evaluation. The project team were also keen to share the detail and impact of the project and had the opportunity to disseminate this at various events.

Sample

We received 791 pre-project and 538 post-workshop surveys and quiz responses from participating students at 28 schools (see Table 1). 153 pre- and 123 post-project quizzes were received from non-participating (comparison group) students at eight schools⁹. Of these, we were able to match 364 pre- and post-responses from participating students and 87 responses from non-participating students¹⁰. Data analysis also includes findings from 208 post-project surveys completed by students trained as Media Literacy Ambassadors and feedback from 509 students who received sessions co-delivered by MLAs.

Findings from students are complemented by teacher feedback from 70 surveys (28 post-workshop and 42 post-project answering questions relating only to elements of the project in which they had been involved¹¹), qualitative data from five youth panels and three post-delivery virtual check-ins involving 28 students from three schools, and 10 semi-structured interviews with teachers.

⁹ Schools were invited to ask students in the same year group (so the same age), but from a non-participating class, to act as a comparison group. Findings from this group were intended to give a sense of what might have happened, over time, without the intervention.

¹⁰ Responses were matched to pre-project surveys using initials and birth month

¹¹ E.g. training, initial workshops, Media Literacy Ambassador training and/ or observing co-delivered workshops

Table 1: Survey responses

	Time point	Purpose	Potential participants	Number of surveys completed / (matched)
Students	Pre-project quiz (intervention group)	To allow comparison with post- <i>Behind the Headlines</i> student quiz	807	791 (364)
	Pre-project news quiz (comparison group)	To compare with intervention group	n/a	153 (87)
	Post-workshop reflective survey and quiz	To measure short-term changes in news literacy attitudes and skills	807	538 (364)
	Post-project news quiz (comparison group)	To compare with intervention group	n/a	123 (87)
	Peer Media Literacy Ambassador feedback	To provide insight into experience of media literacy support for peers	807	208
	Feedback from co-delivered to students	To share feedback on sessions co-delivered by peer MLAs	3,742	509
Teachers	Educator post-training and workshop survey	To provide teachers' perspectives on initial and co-delivered workshops	86	28
	Educator follow-up survey	To provide teachers' perspectives on short- to medium-term impact	86	42

Sample demographics

The project was aimed at students aged 14 to 18, with most of those completing surveys in years 9 or 10 (14 to 15, 78.1%)¹². Slightly more female than male students took part (52.5% vs 47.5%). Nearly 3 in 10 (27.3%) said they received free school meals (FSMs), a proxy of socio-economic background. Findings were not intended to

¹² Year 9 (48.6%, n = 175), Year 10 (29.4%, n = 106), Year 11 (1.9%, n = 7), Year 12 (3.9%, n = 14), Year 13 (16.1%, n = 58)

be nationally representative, and this was higher than the national average in England¹³, reflecting an aim to reach young people from under-represented backgrounds by targeting settings with higher-than-average eligibility for FSMs¹⁴.

Findings in detail

The following sections will explore findings from surveys, quizzes, panels and interviews in more depth, considering them in relation to evaluation questions and to objectives set in the programme's Theory of Change.

1: The Media Literacy Ambassador project improved media and news literacy skills in the young people it worked with.

1.1 More participating than non-participating students were able to identify reliable and unreliable news stories correctly after taking part.

An important objective of the *Behind the Headlines* Media Literacy Ambassador programme is to increase young people's critical engagement with news and media. This includes improving their ability to assess, analyse and evaluate news stories and to identify reliable news and mis- and disinformation¹⁵. Participating students were asked to complete a short quiz comprising three examples of age-appropriate news items (a mixture of reliable and unreliable news presented as screenshots – see Appendix 2 for an example) before and after taking part in the initial workshop.

Findings showed that more students were able to identify two of three items correctly as 'real' or 'fake' after the workshop, increasing from 2 in 5 (39.9%, n = 364) students in the pre-project quiz to 7 in 10 (68.5%) in the post-workshop quiz (see Figure 1), an increase of 28.6 percentage points (pp). Non-participating students in the comparison group were also asked to complete the same quiz at

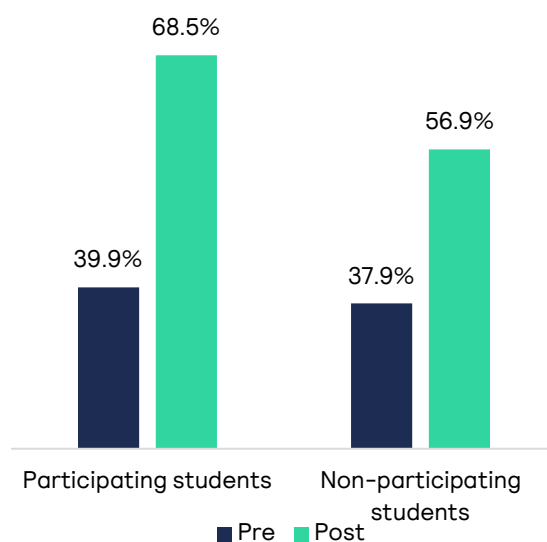
¹³ 23.8% during the period of project delivery – see: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

¹⁴ Children from lower-income backgrounds report lower confidence in evaluating media and news stories than their peers from higher-income homes (Picton et al., 2021).

¹⁵ See Appendix 1, Theory of Change, short-term outcomes: "Young people have increased confidence, knowledge and skills to critically engage with and analyse news and media" and "Young people are more able to distinguish between reliable news and mis- and disinformation."

similar time points¹⁶. A higher percentage of students in this group were also able to correctly identify two of three items in the post-quiz (increasing from 37.9% to 56.3%, n = 87). However, the percentage-point increase (18.4pp) for this group was 10.2pp lower than the participating group. Despite potential influencing factors¹⁷, these findings indicate that more students in the participating group were able to identify reliable and unreliable news items when compared with students who had not participated.

Figure 1: Percentage of students able to identify two of three news items correctly at pre-project and post-workshop time points



Students who took part in the *Behind the Headlines* workshop were also asked to identify two examples of mis- and disinformation. 4 in 5 (81.5%) were able to identify both examples correctly following the workshop. This suggests the workshop was also effective in supporting most students to identify mis- and disinformation.

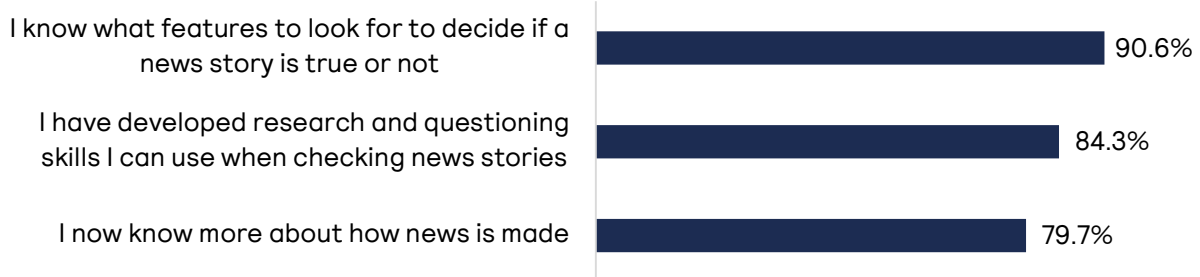
1.2 Participating students and teachers reported improved media and news literacy knowledge, behaviours and confidence when evaluating news and information.

¹⁶ Schools were invited to ask students in the same year group, from a non-participating class, to act as a comparison group.

¹⁷ Increased scores across both groups may, in part, reflect the lack of validated measures for this age group, the difficulty of finding safe and relevant items for tests, ensuring items presented equal levels of challenge, increased familiarity with the nature of the test (e.g. becoming sensitive to the underlying research design) and cross-contamination between groups of students where participating and comparison groups completed quizzes at different times.

Following the workshop, most students reported increased media and news literacy knowledge. 9 in 10 (90.6%) felt they knew what features to look for when deciding if a news story was true or not, and 4 in 5 said that they had developed research and questioning skills they could use when checking news stories (84.3%), and that they now knew more about how news was made (79.7%, see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of participating students agreeing with post-workshop statements



We also asked teachers who had observed workshops for their perceptions on their impact on sessions co-delivered to students. All (23 of 23) teachers responding to the post-workshop survey agreed that students had increased understanding about how news stories were constructed¹⁸, all felt students had increased knowledge of what constituted mis- and disinformation, and 22 of 23 teachers believed students had developed research and questioning skills for checking news and media stories.

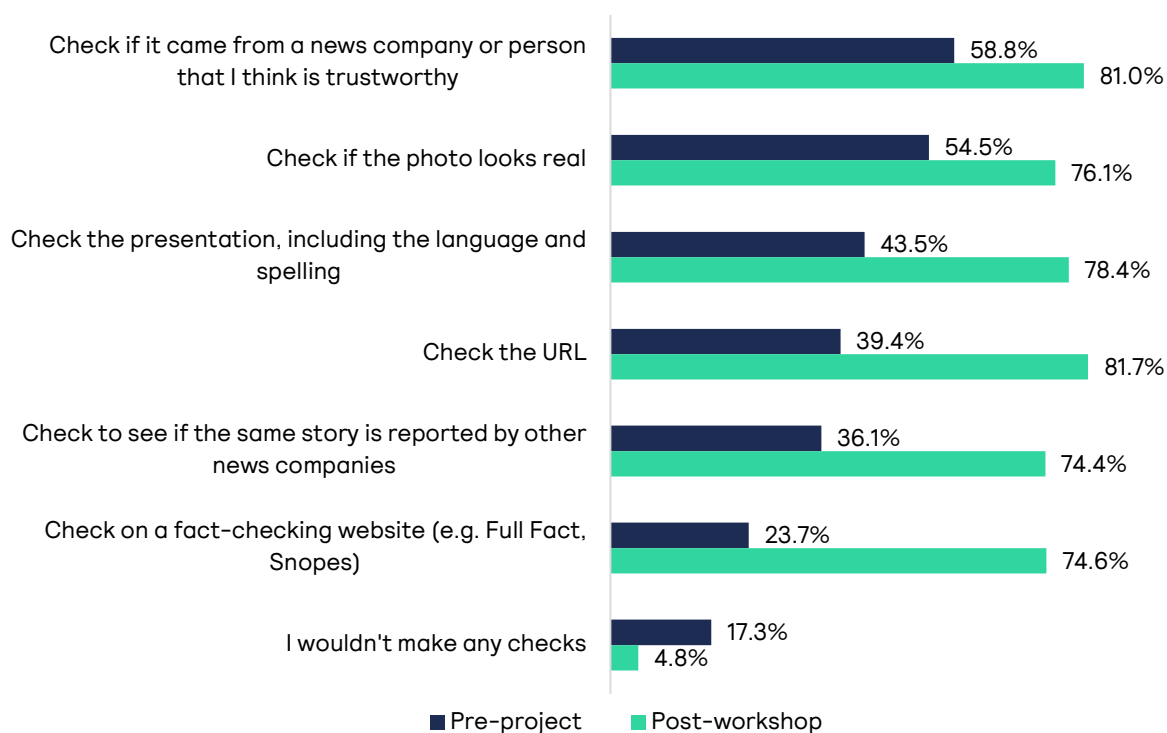
While news knowledge plays an important role in predicting behaviours including the identification of misinformation (Vraga et al., 2021, Ku et al., 2019), knowledge and awareness do not automatically translate to critical news consumption (Swart, 2021; Tamboer et al., 2022). Research has emphasised the application of news literacy behaviours observed when people engage critically with news content (Vraga et al., 2021). For example, lateral reading¹⁹ has been shown to be an effective fact-checking technique (Wineburg et al., 2022; Brodsky et al., 2023). Students were, therefore, also asked about behaviour when evaluating the credibility of a news story before and after taking part in the workshop.

¹⁸ Relating to Theory of Change (TOC) outcome, “Young people increase their knowledge of news and media production processes.”

¹⁹ Opening more than one tab on a browser to see if and how something is reported elsewhere, also referred to as ‘horizontal research’ within the project.

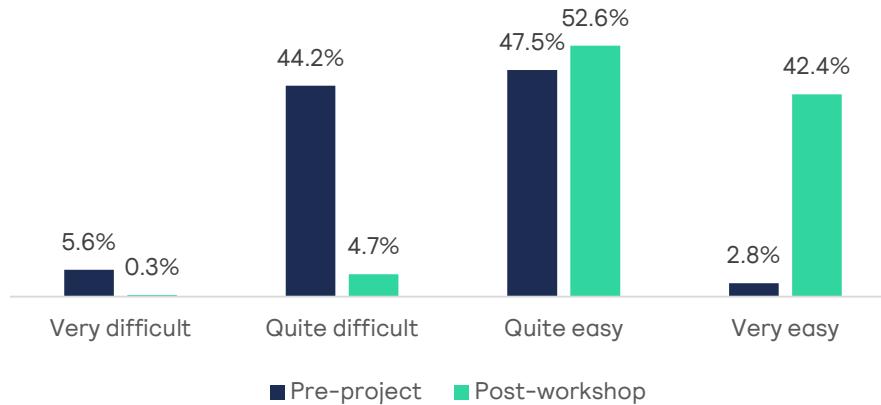
As shown in Figure 3, participating students reported increased critical engagement with news following the workshop. For example, while many reported considering the trustworthiness of the source and visual evidence before taking part, more reported strategies known to be effective such as consulting other sources and fact-checking sites at post-test. The percentage who said they would check if a news story was reported elsewhere doubled from 36.1% to 74.4%, while nearly three times as many students said they would use a fact-checking site after taking part (increasing from 23.7% to 74.6%). This suggests that many students learned new techniques for evaluating the reliability of news stories.

Figure 3: Which, if any, of the following would you do to check if a news story was trustworthy? (Tick all that apply)



Surveys have found that young people’s confidence around spotting misinformation may not be reflected in their abilities (Ofcom, 2022). However, young people were asked about their sense of self-efficacy when evaluating media and news to explore any changes over the course of the intervention. Students participating in the project reported greater confidence after taking part in the initial workshop, with the percentage who said they found it either ‘quite’ or ‘very’ easy to tell if a news story was trustworthy increasing from 50.3% before to 95.0% after (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: How easy or difficult is it for you to tell if a news story is trustworthy?



In addition, more than 4 in 5 (86.6%) students agreed that they felt able to judge whether a news story was trustworthy and, of this group, 2 in 3 (67.2 %) were able to identify two of three news quiz items correctly in the short test, suggesting that for these students at least, their sense of their own ability in this area was accurate. This finding contradicts other research, which has found that confidence levels do not reflect ability (Nygren & Guath, 2019; Ofcom, 2022).

While increasing students’ interest in news was not a primary objective of this project, it has been linked with news literacy (Tamboer et al., 2022) so we were interested to see any changes in this area over the course of the project. Just 1 in 4 (26.1%) students said they were interested in news before taking part, increasing to 7 in 10 (72.5%) after taking part. In addition, we asked about students’ value for media literacy (VML) and ‘appreciation of credible news’, which has also emerged as an important factor in news literacy (see, e.g., Vraga et al, 2021; Nygren & Guath, 2021). Around 4 in 5 participating students agreed it was important to them to be able to access news they can trust (83.4%), to think about whether news was accurate (82.9%), and to learn how to understand the news (78.6%). Comments from youth panels highlighted students’ thoughts on why accurate news is important, with one student observing, “Fake news can affect lives, so news needs to be trustworthy. If you are truthful then you can spread peace.”

Fake news can affect lives, so news needs to be trustworthy. If you are truthful then you can spread peace.

2: The peer-to-peer model supported reach, consolidated learning and provided engaging and relevant sessions that were co-delivered to students.

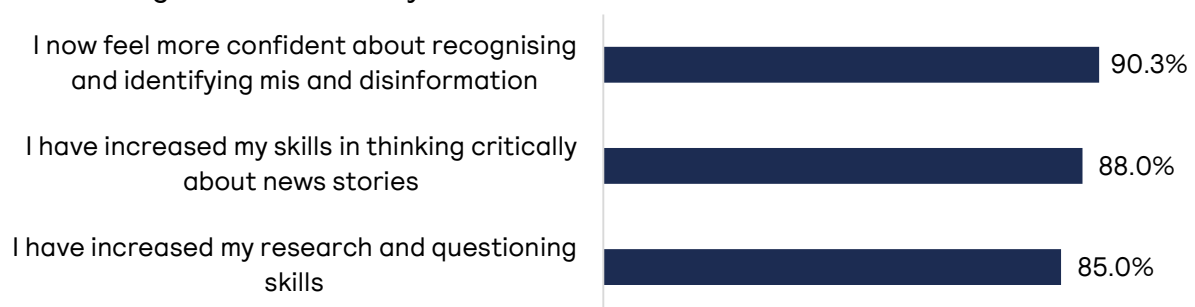
2.1 Media Literacy Ambassadors (MLAs) reported stronger media and news literacy skills after co-delivering sessions to peers.

A key outcome for the programme related to involving young people in co-creating and co-delivering sessions to their peers²⁰. To this end, students were trained as Media Literacy Ambassadors (MLAs) and went on to deliver sessions based on the initial workshop to other classes within their setting, either in the same or another year group. Of students who provided feedback on how many sessions they had co-delivered (n = 208), most (150) said they had co-delivered one session, 42 had co-delivered two sessions and nine had co-delivered three sessions.

As shown in Figure 5, students' feedback indicated that most MLAs felt that co-delivering media literacy sessions to their peers helped reinforce their earlier learning. More than 9 in 10 agreed that, since being trained and acting as a Media Literacy Ambassador, they felt more confident about recognising mis- and disinformation (90.3%, see Figure 5). 4 in 5 said that they had increased skills in thinking critically about news stories (88.0%) and better research and questioning skills (85.0%).

Figure 5: Percentage of Media Literacy Ambassadors agreeing with post-workshop statements

Since being a Media Literacy Ambassador...



²⁰ "Young people co-create resources and co-deliver sessions to peers, developing presentation, communication and leadership skills."

Youth Panels provided further insights into the way in which the MLA role reinforced their earlier learning, because of “... the need to understand what you’re doing before you can teach others.” 9 in 10 (88.3%) MLAs felt they had helped other students learn about media and news literacy in a relevant way, and 4 in 5 (81.9%) thought their role had helped other students to feel engaged with the workshops. Several MLA students observed the complementary nature of teacher and student perspectives:

When delivering to our peers I heard comments about how fun and relatable it was, and how they could connect it to their daily life. It was fun and very effective.

... a better relationship develops between teachers and students who although they may not have as much life experience [and] we grew up in different eras and times, it helps give a different perspective and we can bring all this together.

It’s different when there’s not that power dynamic (as there is with teacher/student). So, you can feel more confident in asking for help.

Others felt that the experience of being an MLA had increased their sense of the relevance of media and news literacy to everyday life:

Exploring the workshop and teaching got me to realise that media literacy has a huge effect on ... the skills we can use in our daily life.

It’s a wonderful realisation and experience and great to be shared with others and our peers.

When invited to say what the experience of being a Media Literacy Ambassador meant to them, students’ comments indicated that many enjoyed the opportunity to teach others and to gain new skills, and appreciated the team-based model of delivery:

I loved how not only were we being educated but also given the opportunity to educate others about fake or real news making it a very interactive project!

Doing it in a group has been a lot better than doing it on your own. It’s someone to fall back on if you get a bit stuck.

It helped me gain a lot of confidence, I see myself differently, I trust myself more, referring to sources and talking to people.

Finally, 3 in 4 MLAs felt they had increased presentation (76.7%) and communication skills (75.2%), while 7 in 10 felt they had improved leadership skills (71.3%) and confidence (69.7%). This suggests that participating in the project may have contributed to developing many students' transferable skills for the workplace. However, when asked how the project could be improved, several students suggested a practice session ahead of their presentation to other classes:

I think you could have made us present it to our teacher and then she could have given us feedback and told us what to do better.

Teachers' comments about the impact on groups or individual students often highlighted the same themes as above, including the relevance of the topic to students' lives and how the approach had supported less-confident students to challenge themselves:

The group have been pushed out of their comfort zone to work with students from other groups [but] have all come away with more knowledge, confidence and self-belief. A and B went from being incredibly reserved to engaged in their research and feeling confident to present their thoughts to the group.

Students were eager to come with their own research and real-life examples of how they had worked out what they were seeing online was misinformation. The students have loved it and we now have Y7 & Y8 students asking if they can train to become ambassadors.

C has really thrived as a leader. He has since joined the student council, become a student ambassador and has really shone in the delivery sessions.

One of our very bright but disenchanted pupils who is also in receipt of FSM took exceptionally well to the project and took a lead role. She really enjoyed teaching her peers, was delighted with her certificate, featured on school social media and we got very positive feedback from family too, so huge positives all round.

These findings emphasise the variety of benefits associated with the experience of being trained as a Media Literacy Ambassador. Most importantly, students reported the experience had reinforced their earlier learning about media and news literacy, as they had to be sure of what they went on to teach. Another prominent outcome reported by students and teachers related to increased confidence and communication skills.

2.2 Students found the sessions co-delivered by MLAs engaging and reported positive outcomes in relation to media and news literacy knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and confidence.

The next section of this report will explore the project from the perspective of students who took part in media literacy sessions co-delivered by students trained as Media Literacy Ambassadors. Most Media Literacy Ambassadors delivered sessions to younger students. A typical session involved students in years 9 to 12 (aged 13 to 17) co-delivering to students in years 7 to 9 (aged 11 to 14). Evaluation of this group of students sought to explore to what extent these sessions were effective in supporting media and news literacy knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and confidence, considering different starting points in the younger age groups who were receiving the sessions.

Feedback from students receiving the sessions suggested most had found them a positive and engaging experience. More than 3 in 4 (77.7%) rated the workshop 'excellent' (26.5%) or 'good' (51.2%). Comments included:

Really immersive, activities were great, had fun while learning.

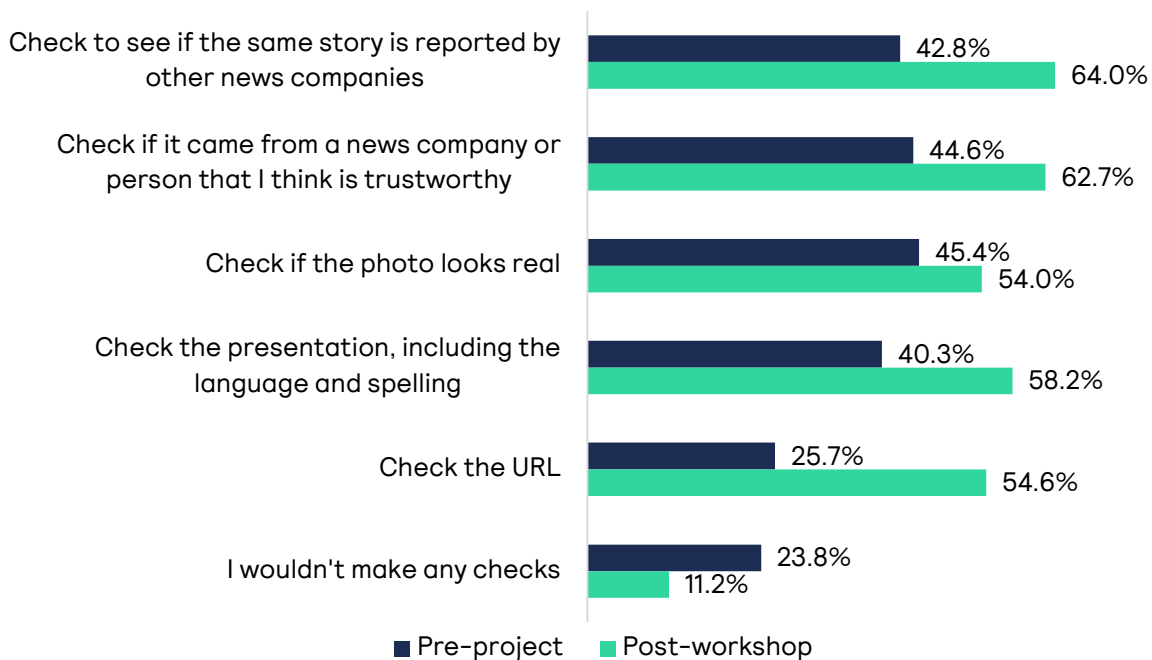
They explained a lot and made me feel more interested in that sort of thing.

Outcomes reported by students who took part in co-delivered workshops were also very positive, albeit slightly lower and less consistent overall than outcomes reported by MLAs. For example, following the workshop, 3 in 4 (73.9%) agreed they had developed research and questioning skills they could use when checking news stories, compared with 84.3% in the main group. Similarly, 80.7% felt they knew what features to look for to decide if a news story was true or not, compared with 90.6% in the MLA group.

There were also increases in students' self-reported critical engagement with news following the workshop, suggesting many receiving the sessions had learned effective ways to evaluate the reliability of a news article. For example, the percentage who said they would check if an article came from a news company or person they thought was trustworthy increased from 44.6% before to 62.7% after the workshop (+18.1pp, see Figure 6). This compared with an increase from 58.8% to 81.0% in the MLA group (+22.2pp). Similarly, the percentage of students who said they'd check the URL doubled in both groups, from 25.7% to 54.6% in the group receiving the sessions and from 39.4% to 81.7% in the MLA group. However, a lower

impact was in the percentage reporting that they wouldn't make any checks, decreasing from 23.8% to 11.2% in the co-delivered group compared with a decrease from 17.3% to 4.8% in the MLA group.

Figure 6: Students receiving the co-delivered sessions: which, if any, of the following would you do to check if a news story was trustworthy? (Tick all that apply)



Positive outcomes were also found in relation to increased confidence and improved attitudes in the group receiving the sessions. The percentage of students who felt it was 'quite' or 'very' easy to tell if a news story was trustworthy increased from 58.9% to 92.7% between the pre- and post-workshop points, which is similar to the increase from 52.1% to 94.0% seen in the MLA group. The group receiving the sessions also reported increased interest in news after the session delivered by MLAs, with the percentage of students interested in news doubling from 26.5% to 53.4%, compared with an increase from 26.9% to 68.8% in the MLA group.

2.3 Teachers' perspectives on the impact of co-delivered sessions on students

We also asked teachers who had participated in, or observed, sessions co-delivered by MLAs for their perceptions on their impact on students receiving the sessions. Feedback was positive overall. Of 26 teachers responding to a question about the impact of the involvement of MLAs on students, 16 rated this 'very

positive', nine 'quite positive' and one 'not very positive' (citing an underprepared group). Most teachers felt students had increased skills to critically engage with news (22 of 22), and 19 of 21 observed that students increasingly thought critically about news stories, with 18 of 21 seeing students use research and questioning skills. Alongside these specific outcomes, teachers' comments often highlighted the engagement of students receiving the sessions, the teamwork displayed by MLAs, and the wider benefits to students' confidence and leadership skills:

It was wonderful seeing the Media Literacy Ambassador pupils empowered and confidently delivering the workshops. Although the Year 11s were nervous, they all engaged well with the pupils.

A wonderful sense of joint endeavour amongst the pupils was in evidence when observing the lessons.

The students have loved being part of the project. They have built their confidence in working with others [and] it has enabled them to become more critical in their consumption of news. They feel privileged and proud to be part of the project.

A minority of teachers had concerns around MLAs' ability to deal with poor behaviour and to co-create effective presentations:

One of the sixth form groups found the peer delivery difficult with Y9; their behaviour was tricky.

Overall, findings suggest that co-delivered workshops were effective in supporting students to learn techniques for evaluating the reliability of news, encouraged students to make a variety of checks when evaluating news, and had a positive impact on students' media and news literacy attitudes and confidence. While one school experienced difficulties with student behaviour and another found issues with co-creation, this is perhaps to be expected as part of delivery to 31 schools. It may, however, inform future iterations of the project in relation to any additional guidance or quality control needed alongside existing training and regular student check-in sessions.

3: Qualitative data provided insights into areas for improvement and suggested the MLA programme was a sustainable approach to supporting media and news literacy.

3.1 Youth panels offered insights into the benefits of involving young people in supporting media and news literacy and suggested helpful improvements to training and evaluation.

A series of seven youth panels were held throughout the delivery period, with students from three schools participating in regular discussions with the project and evaluation team. Students were selected by teachers and usually took part in groups of four. Participants were assured that responses would be anonymised if used in any report or publication. Questions were designed to explore young people's wider experience of the news, their experiences of taking part in the project, and their thoughts on evaluation.

The main themes emerging from conversations with panels were the benefits of including young people in supporting media and news literacy, their sense of the most effective techniques for engaging younger students and for evaluating their learning and the challenges and benefits of the MLA role. Youth panels and surveys also offered helpful suggestions around improving delivery and evaluation. For example, one student suggested having MLAs present to a teacher in advance of their first co-delivery session, while others suggested including more informal discussion opportunities alongside online surveys. Representative comments are included in relevant sections of the report above.

3.2 Teacher interviews highlighted how the project complemented the curriculum, allowed greater reach and offered a sustainable model for supporting media and news literacy.

Alongside opportunities to comment on the project through online surveys, all teachers involved in the project were invited to take part in semi-structured online interviews to gather feedback on their experience of the project, its impact on students and their own practice, and on the sustainability of the approach to supporting media and news literacy in their school²¹. Ten teachers agreed to interviews conducted several months after schools had taken part in the initial workshop. Responses were recorded, transcribed and returned to teachers for confirmation and permission for anonymised use, before being analysed and synthesised by theme. The following themes emerged:

The project reinforced and complemented the current curriculum.

²¹ Relating to short-term outcomes: "Educators have increased knowledge, skills and confidence to support and engage young people in media and news literacy" and medium-to-long-term outcomes: "Peer-supported media and news literacy approaches become embedded in settings."

Teachers highlighted cross-curricular connections across citizenship, English, history, media studies and PSHE, but mentioned an absence of attention to the mis- and disinformation students are exposed to through social media in the existing curriculum, and how this project allowed space to explore that:

It's directly relevant to everything the students do. We're just mapping out a curriculum for next year, and we intend to integrate research methods based on this project into subjects, because we think it's brilliant.

The project model allowed the project greater reach while giving students co-delivering workshops ownership over their learning.

It's good for the students they're engaging with because they understand the way that they consume information and news more. They've rolled out to a lot more students rather than one teacher delivering it. We reached about 150 students.

They got to do things that are in the media right now, they're working with others on their own level, so it was more of a discussion. It makes it their own, making them able to make their own decisions, a skill we want our learners to develop. It was a nice way to teach that, actively, rather than just giving information.

What appeals to us most as educators is the programme's structure of peer-to-peer delivery. Our young people will be more confident presenting, leading and engaging with news.

Acting as a Media Literacy Ambassador had a positive impact on students' confidence and communication skills.

Our cohort may have been out of education for a long time. Their confidence is on the floor. We weren't sure how they were going to adapt, but they are just coming out of themselves. They felt honoured they'd been chosen, and we trusted them.

The way that they were able to communicate with other students was really interesting. Students I thought would have struggled did really well and excelled. Judging by their written work, you might not have expected them to be confident or

articulate, but perhaps that's where they were able to shine. The speaking and listening, and the confidence and communication verbally, has been really positive.

High-quality training, resources and project design supported successful delivery.

The workshop was so good, it was organised in such a way that even if students were nervous, they were confident in what they were delivering because it'd been taught so well, so the delivery was very well done.

The series of PowerPoints is highly effective, the learning is sequenced and the resources are pitched perfectly. The pace of the lessons helps the engagement and scaffolds all the other parts that secure foundation.

Links to the Guardian brand gave the project credibility, supporting senior leader, student and family engagement.

It's international, it makes it recognisable. [And] it's that process of how journalists will fact check before they put a news story out. It adds weight to talking about disinformation if they understand how stories are constructed.

It's like a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity – many of my students said that. We studied sources from *The Guardian* in Media, so when they meet someone at *The Guardian*, it makes them think about journalism, different careers, they might even talk on LinkedIn with journalists. It broadens their understanding and horizons.

Some teachers observed a longer-term impact on students' media and news literacy attitudes and behaviours.

Their ability to look at local, national news stories, reporters' research skills, and fact-checking was massive. They might have read something and thought, 'I don't really know [if it's trustworthy],' but now they think, 'I'm going to find out.' That's brilliant.

Even weeks after they'd done the workshops, they were saying, "Oh, I've started applying that in history now." I think the skills they have picked up in terms of that ability to be critical and research, I do think that's sustainable in the long term.

Almost all teachers felt the project model was sustainable and shared future plans.

They've delivered to the media and the GCSE students, we've now trained the business students, and they're going to make it more bespoke, focus on stories that involve business. And maybe art students, because it might inspire an exhibition, misinformation, disinformation, as a kind of stimulus.

The most exciting thing is what's come after it. There's been sessions in other curriculum subjects, where students have been helping support their peers in different subjects, and it's all the MLAs doing it. They've got a taste for it by the sound of it, they like helping each other.

It's going to run on a cycle for us. Every year, students will be taught by the previous year's MLAs and they will deliver to their own PSHE groups. We'll just keep updating our Padlet, adding resources and it'll become a rich resource for all the students.

Comments from teacher interviews relating to the sustainability of the approach were also reflected in teacher surveys. 14 of 21 teachers agreed they had integrated learning from the project into their wider teaching practice. In addition, almost all teachers who responded to questions about sustainability agreed that:

- the project was an effective way of reaching a larger number of students (18 of 21)
- they would like to use the approach to support media and news literacy projects in their school in future (19 of 22)
- the peer supported approach was effective in engaging students (18 of 22).

The media literacy peer learning programme is one that every school should deliver. All young people will benefit from having the skills to identify mis- and disinformation.

4. Initial findings on longer-term impact.

Following the first year of delivery (2022-23), the project team revisited a percentage of schools for a second time in 2023-24 to deliver refresher training. Evaluation in these schools focused on the value of this second opportunity to take part and any longer-term impact observed following the first year of the project. Initial findings from students and teachers at two of these settings suggest promising outcomes.

Students' comments suggested that skills learned as part of the project had encouraged them to engage critically with news rather than simply avoid it:

I am more open to news and media because I trust that now I can fact-check sources and news. I used to avoid most news all together because I didn't know what was true and what wasn't.

I've learned to be more critical of the media I look at (misinformation and disinformation); I look at the sources, if it is from TikTok or Twitter, since those are more likely to be fake.

Many shared the impact on wider skills, including confidence and oracy:

I started Year 10 extremely shy and wouldn't talk to anyone really, especially not in class, but since doing the programme I speak to a lot more people and even got a distinction in my speaking and listening this year.

I'm a student representative and I assisted my colleagues as I made their concerns heard to the college board.

Feedback from teachers highlighted some similar themes, such as increased critical engagement with media and news that supported their broader studies and transferable skills:

Impact for our students is significant. In terms of critical engagement with news, this has been the most profound impact – students who have a wider knowledge of legitimate news journalism and now regularly tell us that they have been reading the news from apps they have downloaded.

Students have gained a crucial understanding of questioning sources of information across a range of subjects and the ability to evaluate these as well as consider their provenance. These skills will both be vital in future study and careers.

We are seeing long-term improvement in those transferable skills: oracy, leadership and teamwork. Those ambassadors from the previous year are now on their Level 3 studies and incorporating their skills into their academic programmes allowing them to thrive. The improved confidence this has fostered cannot be underestimated.

At the same time, one teacher mentioned the need for participating students to take time away from the curriculum for training:

It is a decent program; however, those selected for this project are taken away from lessons to conduct the training and therefore missing practical experiments and lessons on the things they require for exams.

Teachers also shared the benefits of students trained as MLAs in Year 1 of the project supporting the new group of MLAs:

The benefits to our Year 11 MLAs have been empowering – they have enjoyed talking to our new Year 10 MLAs about how they delivered and offering tips and advice. It is also about demonstrating what knowledge they have retained and developing their skills further. These MLAs will help to train teachers across the wider college which demonstrates the level of confidence they have now.

I think the second year has been hugely valuable. It has enabled us to use previous ambassadors to inspire others. This year's MLAs wish to emulate their peers.

Final comments summarised the breadth of benefits teachers observed in terms of the impact on skills, confidence and the ability to reach more students:

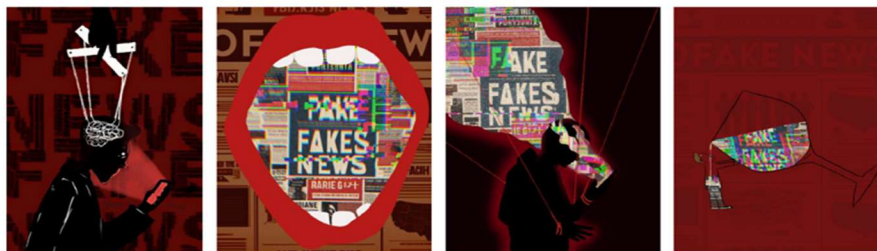
I can only stress that the benefits this project has given the students are endless.

The source evaluation skills are vital for all academic subject areas but it is particularly the confidence and the vast amount that this has increased in such a short time. Students have been delivering to groups and doing things they never thought they were capable of. It's a joy to see.

It is my favourite project we have been involved in as it makes an invaluable impact to our students. The model allows us to scale it up to increase the numbers of students who benefit. The showcases have been a fantastic celebration that encourage our students to raise their aspirations. We all love the programme.

One setting used the second year of delivery to train students studying Digital Media and Foundation Learning, and tracked their progress using film, interviews, reflections, surveys and creative work based on asking critical questions of news sources and information. Examples of creative responses to this theme included screensavers, internet banners and large-scale posters for school corridors.

Figure 7: An example of creative responses to the Media Literacy Ambassador project



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5. Key findings from SEND settings.

The project was also delivered to four groups of students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) in three settings. Surveys were edited to ensure the language, quizzes and format were as accessible as possible, including some changes in vocabulary and a focus on core questions.

Notes on sample

Data was received most consistently from one setting²², and, as this setting delivered the project in both Year 1 and Year 2 of the project, findings are presented as a single case study. Across years 1 and 2 of the project, 19 responses were received for the pre-project quiz and 18 to the post-workshop survey and quiz, of which 15 were matched by initials. 19 Media Literacy Ambassador (MLA) feedback surveys were also received, along with 27 responses from students receiving the sessions. Findings from students were complemented by two teacher feedback surveys and one teacher interview.

Students showed increased news and media literacy skills.

- Students who took part in the workshop were more able to identify real and fake news articles correctly following the workshop. The number of participating students who were able to identify two out of three news articles correctly as real or fake increased from 7 of 15 before to 12 of 15 after the workshop.

Students reported increased knowledge and confidence when evaluating the credibility of news.

- Following the workshop, 14 of 15 students agreed that they now knew some good ways to check if news stories were trustworthy and 12 of 15 that they knew more about mis- and disinformation.
- Less than half (7 of 15) students said they found it easy to tell whether a news story was trustworthy before taking part in the workshop. This increased to all 15 students after the workshop.
- The workshop somewhat increased the students' interest in news as a group, with 7 in 15 describing themselves as 'quite interested' before and 10 in 15 as 'quite interested' after the workshop.

²²Other settings provided, for example, pre-project but no post-project data

Peer Media Literacy Ambassadors reported improved critical media and news literacy skills, and teachers' comments suggested benefits for their confidence.

- Of students who took on the role of Media Literacy Ambassador co-delivering sessions to young people in other classes, most (16 of 19) believed their research and questioning skills were better and felt more confident about recognising mis- and disinformation as a result.
- Most felt they had helped other students about media and news literacy in a relevant way (14 of 19), although only 9 of 19 felt they had done this in an engaging way. This suggests that more students were confident about the content of the sessions than in their abilities to teach the content effectively.
- This was also reflected in feedback around presentation and communications skills. About half of the students trained as MLAs felt they had increased their presentation (9 of 19) and communication skills (10 of 19).
- At the same time, teachers' comments on the impact on MLAs noted that the group were "incredibly shy. Autism means some pupils just want to be in their own space – the thought of standing up and speaking or even contributing in class is terrifying. But with this small cohort, it worked beautifully". Teachers highlighted the additional challenges faced by the young people trained in this role and the progress made:

My pupils usually hate standing up and doing any sort of presenting. I have been astonished at how keen they are to teach the Year 9s and how seriously they have taken the teaching side of things.

Many of our participating Year 11 pupils have communication difficulties; it was amazing to watch these pupils delivering such engaging material with insight and understanding.

It was wonderful seeing the Media Literacy Ambassadors empowered and confidently delivering the workshops. Although they were nervous, they all engaged well with the pupils.

Slightly more students reported increased critical engagement and confidence after taking part in a workshop co-delivered by MLAs.

- There were slight increases in the number of students who received sessions co-delivered by MLAs saying they would engage critically with news following the workshop. The number who said they would consider the trustworthiness of the source of news increased from 19 before to 22 (of 27) after the

workshop, while the number who said they would check to see if a story was reported elsewhere rose from 14 to 17 (of 27).

- In addition, the number who said they found it easy to tell if a news story was trustworthy increased from 15 to 21 of 27.

Teachers highlighted the need for the project, and the impact of the peer-to-peer model on students' knowledge, confidence, speaking and listening.

- Teachers' survey comments on the impact of the peer-to-peer model highlighted the importance of the project for the students: "Media Literacy is vitally important for our young people and utilising the Year 11 pupils to instruct Year 9 pupils in media literacy is such a rich learning experience for all the pupils."
- Teachers observing the co-delivered sessions commented on the positive impact on students' teamwork, noting, "A wonderful sense of joint endeavour amongst the pupils was in evidence when observing the lessons."
- Teacher interviews provided further insight into experiences of the project, with themes emerging including the benefits for confidence, teamwork and support for speaking and listening:

The pupils have a better awareness of mis- and disinformation and more importantly how damaging it is but also how false news stories can be believed. The pupils were discussing a news story and looking at different viewpoints. These conversations between pupils are amazing.

What an excellent opportunity for the pupils. The training is expertly organised and it is great to see the collaboration amongst the pupils. A fabulous learning opportunity!

Initial insights into longer-term impact in SEND setting.

Following the first year of the project, one teacher noted that the GSCE question for AQA on media studies focused on mis- and disinformation, meaning students' learning through the project would be directly relevant. In addition, teachers' comments suggested that the project would continue, with plans for future MLAs to be trained and resources supporting whole-school assemblies:

The citizenship teacher, because of our involvement in the project, has now doubled up the module – she'll run the module now for the whole of term two. [The project team] sent over slides to enable future Media Literacy Ambassadors to deliver a whole-school assembly as part of driving awareness of mis- and

disinformation and we shall definitely appoint Media Literacy Ambassadors to deliver lessons to Year 9s again.

Overall, findings suggest that co-delivered workshops were effective in supporting students to learn techniques for evaluating the reliability of news and had a positive impact on students' media and news literacy attitudes and confidence. Feedback from teachers provided valuable insight into their perspectives on the wider impact on students taking part and suggest that the project was valued to the extent of running for a second year and for extending to the whole school through additional resources.

Limitations

In the spirit of the design of the project, the evaluation was keen to foreground young people's voices and opinions. Therefore, while the evaluation included a short skills test, most of the data gathered was self-reported and therefore subjective. In addition, despite every effort of the project team to prompt schools and to embed surveys into delivery, pressures on school time meant a substantial decrease in the number of surveys returned over the course of the project. For similar reasons, a small number of students were given incorrect survey links (meaning, for example, that some participating students completed comparison group surveys or even teacher surveys). While matching allowed us to ensure only students for whom we had pre- and post-data were included in final analyses, high levels of attrition and the limited data obtained as a result affects how representative findings are of the wider group taking part. Comparison group data was also very limited and therefore potentially unrepresentative so should be treated with caution.

Summary and discussion

Supporting media and news literacy in an increasingly complex digital environment requires the combined skills and vigilance of legislators, regulators and educators. Policymakers, media organisations, schools and families all have a role to play in empowering young people to become engaged and responsible media and news

creators and consumers. As noted by one of the young people taking part in this project, feeling unsure about what can and can't be trusted in the media can lead to disengagement and avoidance of news. To ensure a functioning democracy, this must be countered by efforts to raise young people's media and news literacy skills and confidence. The evaluation of interventions that aim to help young people foster the critical skills needed to build resilience to mis- and disinformation can make a vital contribution to the evidence base in this area.

The *Behind the Headlines* Media Literacy Ambassador project was designed to teach secondary students effective skills and techniques to evaluate media and news, and to provide the wider context for critical engagement by also improving media and news literacy knowledge, behaviour and confidence. The involvement of teachers and young people underpinned the approach, which centred on training students to co-deliver media literacy sessions to their peers. As well as facilitating greater reach, this model appeared to consolidate learning in students trained as Media Literacy Ambassadors (MLAs).

This evaluation assessed the impact of the first iteration of the project in schools across the Midlands, Manchester, and South and West Yorkshire. The mixed-methods approach included self-reporting and performance-based measures, along with panel discussions and interviews with young people and teachers. Limited comparison group data was available to indicate any difference between participating and non-participating students' ability to identify real and fake news items in a short pre- and post-project test. Primarily, findings indicated that when compared with students in a comparison group, more participating students were able to identify news items correctly as real or fake in post-tests. This suggests the project was effective in helping students identify the features of reliable and unreliable news.

Furthermore, students in both the MLA group and in the groups that they co-delivered media literacy sessions to reported greater critical engagement with media and news. For example, while relatively few students reported making many of a variety of potential checks when evaluating media and news items before taking part, considerably more reported doing so after taking part. This indicates that the project successfully supported students to learn new techniques for evaluating the reliability of news stories. Notably, the model allowed Media Literacy Ambassadors to share their learning widely across other classes and year groups, with many reaching hundreds of fellow students over the course of the project. In doing so, as well as reaching fellow students in an engaging and relevant way, MLAs

not only consolidated their own learning, but also developed greater confidence and transferable skills in communication, teamwork and leadership.

Findings suggest that the Guardian Foundation's *Behind the Headlines* Media Literacy Ambassador programme has the potential to provide an innovative, engaging and effective model for supporting young people navigating media and news in the digital age. Factors that appeared most important to the success of the project included high-quality resources, training and support, respect for young people's experiences of the modern media and news environment, and providing some agency in how they choose to support their peers. In addition, many teachers commented that the Media Literacy Ambassadors project both supported and complemented the curriculum, teaching students valuable research and questioning skills they could use in a range of subjects. Teachers also felt that co-delivery allowed students in this age group an important sense of ownership over their own and others' learning, and almost all teachers felt the project model was one they would continue to use, citing examples of plans for future delivery across the school. These observations should inform any future iterations of the project.

Alongside contributing to the evidence base around what works in supporting media and news literacy in this age group, the evaluation was intended to help improve the MLA project itself. There were a number of areas in which this project and the evaluation could be improved and expanded (see 'What changes would be made', p.10). Several important learning points were suggested by teacher feedback. For example, teachers mentioned that some MLAs had to deal with challenging behaviour in the groups they were delivering to, not all MLAs had the ability to co-create effective sessions and, as with many interventions of this nature, some schools found the project difficult to run alongside existing and changing commitments within their setting. It is important that these points are acknowledged alongside the broader success of the project.

Future directions may include expanding the 'revisiting' model and providing resources not only to schools but also to youth organisations and community groups working with young people. Project recruitment may expand to different regions initially in Lancashire. Teacher champions to scale the project across academy chains could be implemented as well as online resource portals.

With the growth of generative AI, reaching a high volume of young people to support them to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to navigate media and news is becoming even more important. Identifying mis- and disinformation is

likely to become more complex, although it is clear that media literacy initiatives can have a powerful impact on young people's motivation to engage critically with news and information in the digital age, with implications for social participation and democracy. Those that centre the voices and experiences of young people themselves in project design and delivery have the potential to provide even more relevant and engaging opportunities for media literacy learning and discussion.

We hope this evaluation will help all those seeking to support young people and wider society by contributing to the evidence base relating to effective approaches that empower engaged, confident and critical interactions with media and news in the digital age. We also hope it will further develop the skills, behaviour, attitudes and confidence that young people need to thrive in the modern digital environment.

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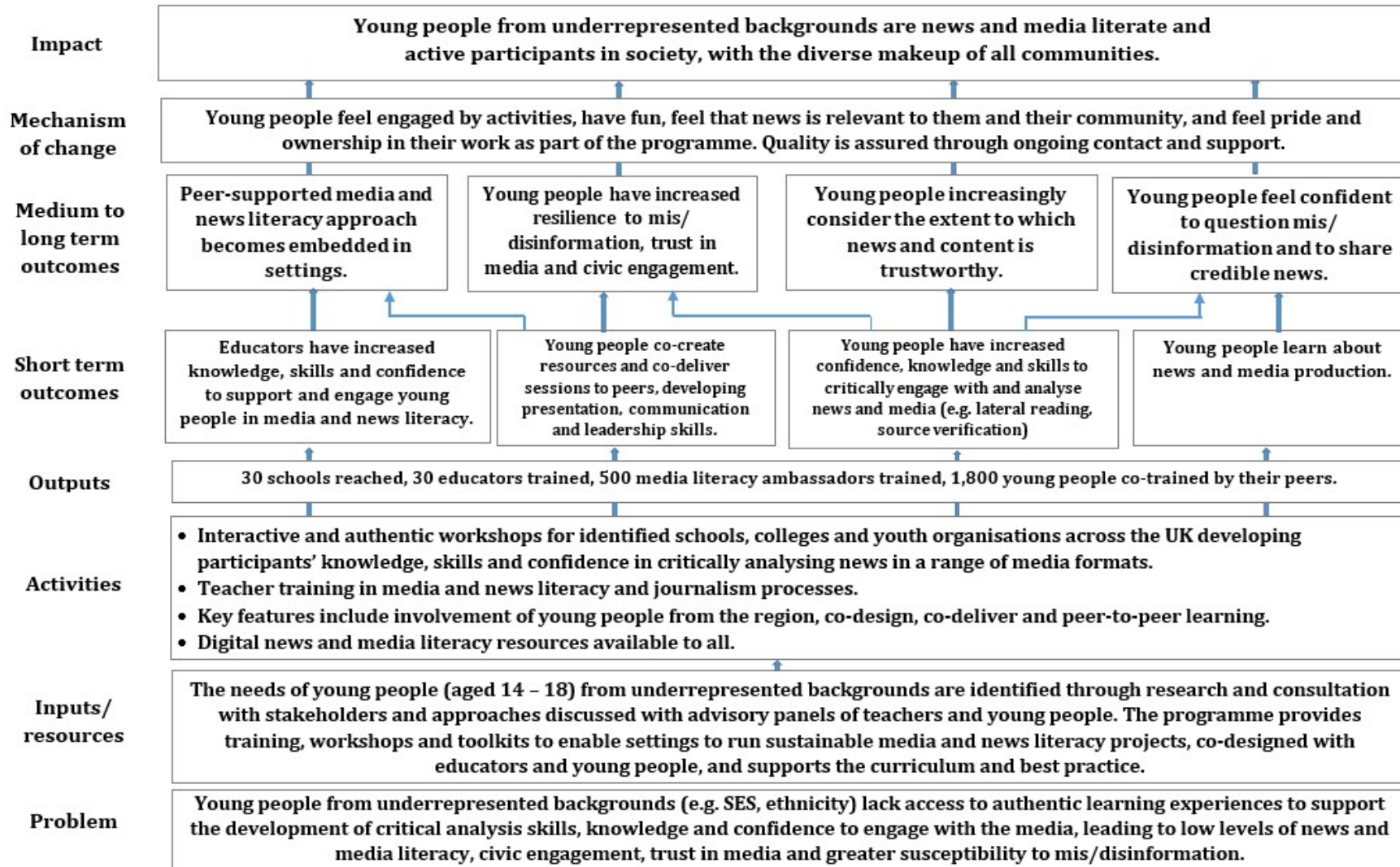
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Appendix 1: Theory of Change

Guardian Foundation Behind the Headlines Media Literacy peer to peer learning Theory of Change 2022

An innovative peer to peer media literacy project for young people aged 14 – 18 from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to develop key critical analysis skills, knowledge and confidence



Appendix 2: Example of news quiz item

<https://news.sky.com/story/british-angler-catches-orange-carp-nicknamed-the-carrot->

sky news

Home UK World Politics US Climate Science & Tech Business Ents & Arts

British angler catches orange carp nicknamed 'the Carrot' on fishing trip to France

Andy Hackett, 43, caught the hybrid leather carp and koi during a fishing trip with friends in Bluewater Lakes in France

By James Robinson, news reporter

Tuesday 22 November 2022 10:34, UK

 Why you can trust Sky News >



A British angler has hooked a huge "goldfish" during a fishing trip with friends.

Andy Hackett, 43, reeled in the stunning 30kg (67lb) orange carp, nicknamed 'the Carrot', while fishing in France.

- Real
- Fake
- I don't have enough information to decide

Appendix 3: Evaluation time points

Survey	Who	When
Student pre-workshop skills quiz	Participating students	Any time before the workshop
Student pre-quiz	Comparison group students	Any time before the workshop
Student post-workshop survey and quiz	Participating students	After the workshop (within a week)
Student post-quiz	Comparison group students	After the workshop
Educator post-workshop survey	Teacher of participating class	After the workshop
Student post-workshop feedback (co-delivery)	Class(es) receiving co-delivered sessions	After a session co-delivered by Media Literacy Ambassadors
Media Literacy Ambassador survey	Media Literacy Ambassadors	After final co-delivered session (within a week)
Educator follow-up survey	Teacher of participating class	A few weeks after project

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About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories. Visit www.literacytrust.org.uk to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

About The Guardian Foundation

Our purpose is to promote global press freedom and access to liberal journalism, and to build a world where people have access to reliable information from a diverse range of sources, strengthening their ability to hold power to account.

We work directly with journalists, news organisations, audiences and educators in schools and across communities to improve news and media literacy, facilitate opportunities for people from underrepresented backgrounds to use their voice and agency, and foster the viability of fact-based news organisations. Together, our programmes create impact and enable change.

Our award-winning *Behind the Headlines* programme empowers young people to understand, critically analyse, engage with and participate in the media. Over 150,000 young people have taken part in our programmes since 2002.

Visit theguardianfoundation.org to find out more, sign up to our newsletter for schools and follow us on LinkedIn and X.

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Involving young people in supporting each other's media and news literacy presents a promising approach to ensuring interventions are engaging and relevant, while supporting reach and reinforcing learning.

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