

West Midlands Media Literacy Draft Strategy

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Media literacy is:

"...the ability to access, analyse and respond critically to, and benefit from a wide range of media" (Ofcom)

"...the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts" (Ofcom)

In practical terms it's about making media, and understanding media through critical debate and discussion.

1. Introduction

This strategy has resulted from discussions and debate at the West Midlands Education forum held in November 2005 and the West Midlands Media Literacy Task Group, which was set up as a result of that forum and has had 4 meetings during the first half of 2006.

This is not the end of the process, it's just beginning. The paper sets out the context for the strategy, and then details a number of priority areas and 'priorities for action' which have so far been identified.

It is the wish of the task group that these priorities feed into the planning of partners and stakeholders which can then, in turn, feed back into the strategy.

2. Vision

Our vision for the outcomes of the strategy and action plan is:

- Development of literacy levels through the delivery of media literacy programmes by a variety of agencies
- Boosting economic development of every industry sector by raising basic skills levels and media awareness.
- Media literacy on the agenda of every local education authority, school and college.
- Every child has an entitlement to critically engage with, enjoy and create a variety of media throughout their school career.
- Develop the West Midlands as a national and international leader in media literacy.
- A dynamic and forward-looking media culture in the West Midlands.
- Creating opportunities for people to realise their potential through access to media training and development.
- Increased community cohesion and identity through access to media production and screening opportunities.

3. Rationale

Media Literacy is important for a number of reasons

- Teaching media literacy has been shown to improve general literacy levels (Bfi). The West Midlands has some of the lowest literacy levels in the country, (source DfES), which contributes to deprivation and social exclusion. Raising literacy levels can provide a boost to economic development.
- By increasing media literacy levels we increase the chances of more creative talent emerging from the region. This talent is needed if the sector is to grow. Key creatives such as screenwriters, directors and producers all need a deep understanding of how meaning is produced through combinations of image and sound.
- Media literate trainers, educators and employers are able to use media in learning in order to engage with reluctant learners and hard to reach groups.
- If we are to grow audiences for specialised film, we need audiences who are able to 'read' and enjoy challenging films.
- Active citizenship: media literacy has a crucial role in people's ability to participate in the democratic operations of this country and to critique and decode the information provided to them.
- Media literacy enables people to participate in society beyond the democratic process. Active participation in many communities (both local communities and communities of interest) and cultural participation relies on media literacy skills.

In partnership with Screen West Midlands, MediaNet held a focus meeting for organisations involved in media education in October 2005. Participants at the meeting expressed a desire for a region-wide approach to the development of media literacy activity. There is a need for opportunities to share good practice and build networks to maximise the impact of existing activity. A strong network will realise the ambition to make the West Midlands a leader in media literacy and media education.

4. Priorities for Action

Four key areas for intervention have been identified:

- Information and communication
- Advocacy
- Support and training
- Production, distribution and exhibition.

In the planning grid (see appendix 1), we have mapped out the priorities for action against the 4 key areas, and also the sector or sectors where the intervention would take place.

At the moment there is a 'long list' of wishes, rather than priorities. A later stage of the strategy development should establish rationale, priorities and phasing of these – in short, an Action Plan

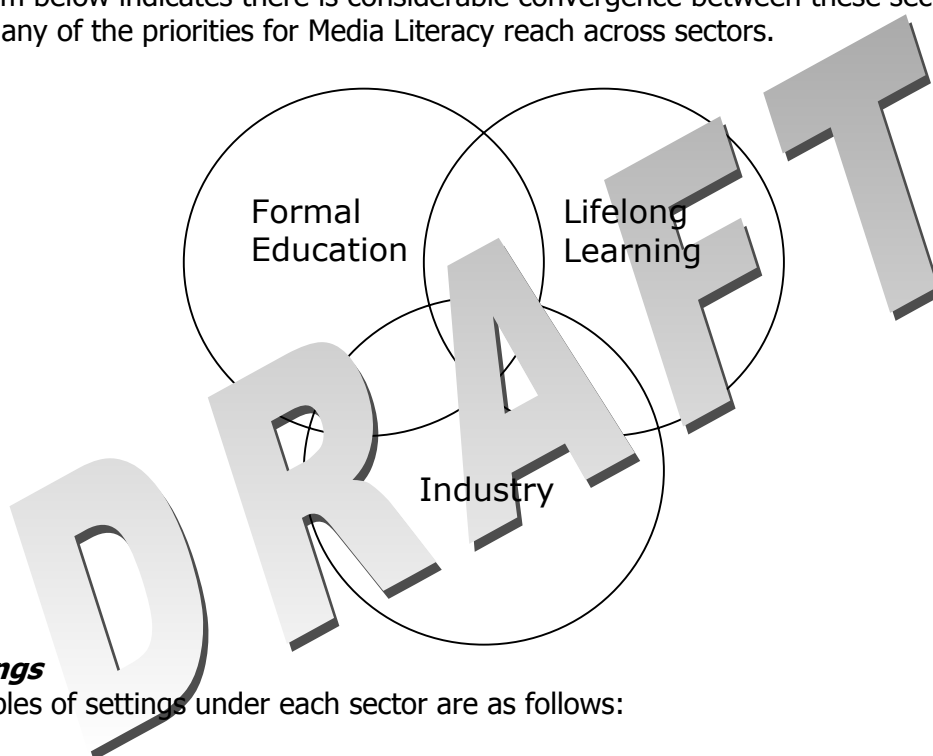
5. Terms of Reference

Types of Media

Although called 'media literacy strategy', the emphasis should be on screen-based media and broadcasting, including the games, web and new media sectors, as well as traditional film, television and radio. This broader range of audiovisual media would include; archive, non-English language, artists' media, shorts, non-professional or user-generated.

Sectors

Three key sectors to be covered by this strategy have been identified. As the diagram below indicates there is considerable convergence between these sectors and many of the priorities for Media Literacy reach across sectors.



Settings

Examples of settings under each sector are as follows:

Formal education

- schools (both in and out of school hours)
- early years settings
- universities
- sixth form and tertiary colleges

Lifelong Learning

- informal settings, e.g. community media organisations
- venues: cinemas, arts centres, community centres
- archives, museums, galleries, libraries
- broadcast media

Industry

- broadcasters
- industry bodies
- production companies

This is not a comprehensive list and many settings will overlap into two or more key sectors.

6. Partners/Stakeholders

Strategy delivery partners.

The following organisations will be invited to participate in the development and delivery of the Action Plan

- Screen West Midlands
- Broadcasters
- Arts Council West Midlands
- LSC
- Local Authorities – Lifelong learning, education, cultural services, social care, youth services
- Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA West Midlands)
- Teacher training institutions
- Skillset
- Digital Central
- Media Cove
- Creative Partnerships
- Schools and Further Education Institutions
- Specialist Media Colleges
- Higher Education
- City Learning Centres
- Independent Arts Sector (including but not exclusively; Rural Media, Light House, Flicks In The Sticks, Mac, Warwick Arts Centre)
- Media Archive for Central England (MACE)
- BFI (British Film Institute)
- First Light
- UK Film Council

Strategy supporters

We will approach the following to endorse our strategy

1. DCMS
2. Ofcom
3. UK Media Literacy Task Force
4. DfES
5. Regional Members of Parliament
6. Associate Parliamentary Media Literacy Group
7. Media Education Association
8. Culture WM
9. Advantage West Midlands
10. Regional Skills Partnership
11. Local Government Officers Association
12. Advantage West Midlands, the Regional Development Agency for the West Midlands.
13. Government Office
14. Regional Assembly

7. Context

National:

In 2003, Ofcom, the communications industry regulator, was given a 'duty to promote media literacy' by the UK government. In response to this new responsibility Ofcom undertook consultation with stakeholders to arrive at a definition for 'media literacy' – a term which is used widely and has many different interpretations. Ofcom's final definition for media literacy is "The ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts". A UK Media Literacy Task Force, made up of industry, government and education representatives, developed a Charter for Media Literacy. The aim of the Charter is to raise levels of public debate about media literacy and provide a powerful means for advocating a creative and critical approach to developing a media literate UK. The Charter For Media Literacy was launched in November 2005.

Regional:

In August 2005 The Rural Media Company established MediaNet, a Screen West Midlands funded network for media education in the West Midlands. Rural Media is a key partner of Screen West Midlands in delivering its media education policy.

In partnership with Screen West Midlands, MediaNet held a focus meeting for organisations involved in media education in October 2005. Participants at the meeting expressed a desire for a region-wide approach to the development of media literacy activity, whilst recognising that the region is made up of contrasting urban and rural areas requiring different approaches to delivery. There is a need for opportunities to share good practice and build networks to maximise the impact of existing activity. A strong network will realise the ambition to make the West Midlands a leader in media literacy and media education.

A regional task group:

The launch of the Charter for Media Literacy further illustrated the need for a coordinated approach to the development of practices to promote media literacy. In response Screen West Midlands formed a regional Media Literacy Task Group which is coordinated by MediaNet. The group has representation from a range of organisations (see appendix 4) from education, lifelong learning and industry.

The task group is working to develop a Media Literacy Action Plan for the West Midlands. The aim of the plan is to clarify the priorities and opportunities for action in the region. This action plan will then be posted on the Euro Media Literacy website (www.euromedialiteracy.eu) – we aim to be the first region in the UK to achieve this.

To gather support and drive forward the action plan MediaNet will hold a Media Literacy Seminar in early 2007. This event will offer the invited audience of key stakeholders from all spheres of media in the West Midlands including media education, the media industry and community media, the opportunity to explore cross-sector collaboration, learn more about the best media literacy work taking place in the region and to play a part in the development of the action plan.

Appendix 1: Action Planning Grid

Priority Area	Action	Sector(s):		
		Formal	Informal	Industry
Advocacy	Convincing schools/informal educators of the value of media education (including cost implications)	Y	Y	
Advocacy	Show the value of community media to organisations and new graduates.		Y	
Advocacy	Build an identity for the West Midlands of excellence in media education	Y	Y	Y
Info and Comms	Case studies of media education projects	Y	Y	
Info and Comms	Make better use of websites for sharing resources and showcasing work	Y	Y	
Info and Comms	Time/engagement with individual film makers – sharing best practice		Y	Y
Info and Comms	Signpost enquiries to the most appropriate organisation	Y	Y	
Info and Comms	Collate and publish bibliography of resources available	Y	Y	
Info and Comms	Provide opportunities to bring the sectors together to discuss and debate	Y	Y	Y
Info and Comms	Understanding what each organisation can offer	Y	Y	Y
Info and Comms	Student roadshows – for careers advice and links into the industry	Y	Y	Y
Info and Comms	Strengthen HE links with industry	Y		Y
Info and Comms	Provide content for the informal education sector e.g. resources, archive material and short films		Y	
Production and Showcasing	Showcasing work	Y	Y	Y
Production and Showcasing	Provide platforms/opportunities for screenings		Y	
Production and Showcasing	Improve access to production and exhibition opportunities		Y	
Support and Training	Strengthen the links between schools/FE education and HE – preparing young people for HE and portfolio development	Y		
Support and Training	Higher level support at media agencies for people at the frontline		Y	

Support and Training	Training of artists to work with schools	Y		
Support and Training	Training of teachers in media skills	Y		
Support and Training	Training of teachers in media education	Y		
Support and Training	Content for media education curriculum e.g. resources, archive material, short films for use in education	Y		
Support and Training	Materials to contextualise short films e.g. interviews with artists/filmmakers to go alongside work, process of production for both professional and student films, online discussions	Y		
Support and Training	Pilot undergraduate mentors working with 6th Form/FE students	Y		
Support and Training	Accrediting activity in the informal sector (including – but not only – production and youth work)		Y	
Support and Training	Provide opportunities for training of youth/community workers		Y	
Support and Training	Provide community media training for practitioners		Y	
Support and Training	Support the cultural development of new entrants and established workers in the industry			Y
Support and Training	Introduce programmes and actions to develop a media literate workforce			Y
Support and Training	Strengthen HE links with community media	Y	Y	

Appendix 2: National Context

1. Under section 11 of the Communications Act (2003) OfCom, the communications industry regulator, was given a 'duty to promote media literacy'.
2. In response to this new responsibility OfCom undertook consultation with stakeholders to arrive at a definition for media literacy – a term which is used widely and has many different interpretations. OfCom's initial view of media literacy was largely concerned with consumers' ability to protect themselves from harmful or offensive content and preparing the public for the analogue to digital switchover.
3. This definition was felt to be too narrow by some media organisations. The UK Film Council, The British Film Institute, Channel Four Television and the BBC formed a Media Literacy Task Force in 2003 to promote a broader and more positive definition for media literacy.
4. The Task Force held an invitation seminar in January 2004 'Inform and Empower: Media Literacy in the 21st Century'. The seminar proposed and gained consensus from its audience of 200 delegates from the media industry, government and education, for a broader definition which encompassed the critical, cultural and creative elements of media literacy.
5. OfCom's final definition for media literacy is "The ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts".
6. Following the success of the 'Inform and Empower' seminar the Task Force (which now added Skillset and an OfCom observer to its membership) developed a Charter for Media Literacy. The aim of the Charter is to raise levels of public debate about media literacy and a powerful means for advocating a creative and critical approach to developing a media literate UK.
7. The Charter For Media Literacy was launched in November 2005. It sets out key definitions and commitments. The Charter seeks a range of organisations as signatories to move forward the case for a creative, participatory and media literate UK. Around 100 organisations pledged support to the Charter, these organisations represented education, media industry, government and community organisations. They included local, regional, national and international organisations and a wide variety of media, although predominantly screen-based.
8. The Charter for Media Literacy has two options for signatories. Sections 1-3 of the Charter are concerned with broad support and upholding of the principles of Media Literacy whilst sections 4-5 are additional clauses for providers of activities that promote media literacy where signatories pledge to participate in research, sharing of best practice and publication of an action plan on the Charter website.
9. The Euro Media Literacy website went live in May 2006 and provides an international platform for organisations to sign the Charter, as a supporter and as a provider. Organisations who sign up to the Charter are encouraged to publish their media literacy action plans on this website.

Appendix 3: The European Charter for Media Literacy

European Charter for Media Literacy

[Name of organisation] is committed to the aims and principles set out below for the better advocacy and development of media literacy in Europe.

1. We make a commitment to:

Raise public understanding and awareness of media literacy, in relation to the media of communication, information and expression;

Advocate the importance of media literacy in the development of educational, cultural, political, social and economic policy;

Support the principle that every European citizen of any age should have opportunities, in both formal and informal education, to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to increase their enjoyment, understanding and exploration of the media.

2. We believe that media literate people should be able to:

- Use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests;
- Gain access to, and make informed choices about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources;
- Understand how and why media content is produced;
- Analyse critically the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey;
- Use media creatively to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions;
- Identify, and avoid or challenge, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful;
- Make effective use of media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities.

3. We will contribute to the development of a media literate European population by offering, or enabling others to offer, opportunities for people to:

- Broaden their experience of different kinds of media form and content;
- Develop critical skills in analysing and assessing the media;
- Develop creative skills in using media for expression and communication, and participation in public debate.

4. We pledge to support or participate in research that will identify and develop:

- Better understanding of what it is to be media literate;
- Effective and sustainable pedagogy for media literacy;
- Transferable evaluative methods and assessment criteria for media literacy.

5. We agree to undertake, or enable others to undertake, the following:

- Build links with other signatories and contribute to the growth of a European network for media literacy;
- Identify and share evidence of the outcomes of media literacy initiatives which we undertake or are associated with;

- Work to make content legally available to be used for media education purposes.

6. We wish to be listed on www.euromedialiteracy.eu as:

- A Supporter of the European Charter for Media Literacy*
- A Sponsor of the European Charter for Media Literacy*
- A Provider under the terms of the European Charter for Media Literacy*

As a provider, we commit to developing a timed and costed organisational Action Plan for Media Literacy, which will implement the Charter commitments we have made. We will publish our Action Plan on www.euromedialiteracy.eu.

Appendix 4: Members of the West Midlands Media Literacy Task Group

Steve Chapman, Screen West Midlands
 Lou Llewellyn, MediaNet Coordinator
 Kathryn Beattie, Light House Media Centre
 Jo Comino, Flicks In The Sticks
 Frank Challenger, Light House Media Centre
 Sue Gainsbrough, Thomas Adams Media Arts College
 Dave Harte, Digital Central
 Louise James, Mac Arts Centre
 Adrian Lambert, The Rural Media Company
 Ruth Leask, Sandwell LEA
 Julian McDougall, Newman HE College
 Nic Millington, The Rural Media Company
 Suzie Ralph, Film Birmingham
 Mark Reid, British Film Institute
 Michael Ryan, Learning and Skills Council
 Richard Shenton, Media Archive for Central England
 Steve Smith, Technology Innovation Centre
 Amy Thomas, Skillset