

**THE FIRST NATIONAL MEDIA STUDIES GCSE CONFERENCE**  
**Institute of Education, London**  
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**“Where Next for Media Studies?”**  
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When I was asked to talk about the future of the subject today, I protested that most media teachers these days aren't usually too bothered about the **future** of the subject: if they could just have a chance to get their heads round the subject as it is **now**, that would be fine, thank you very much.

So what I'll try to do is to approach this in terms of your own futures, and the futures of the young people you're teaching now, and maybe the needs and interests of the students you might be teaching in the future. Where will you, and they, be in, say five years' time, and perhaps more to the point, where do you want to be?

The statistics tell us that at least a quarter of you will have left teaching by 2007. That's the rate at which people are leaving the profession: 25% every five years. That tells us something about the state of the profession. But for those of you who stay, what will you want to be offering your students in 2007, and what do you think they'll want? Here are some possibilities (though some of this may be true for some of you already):

- **You'll want to be offering a course, or courses, in media, that are relevant and interesting for young people.**
- **You'd like to be able to offer a more diverse range of media courses to attract a wider range of students.**
- **You'd like some of your media teaching to be more joined up with other subjects.**
- **You'd prefer not to have to push and cajole the whole cohort of 15- and 16-year olds through the same process of standardized assessment at the same time.**
- **You'll want more opportunities for professional development than you're getting now.**
- **You'd like to have reliable partnerships with local or regional media and with media professionals who could contribute appropriately to your school's media courses.**

As part of their forward planning the DfES have apparently been trying to identify the key ideas or the dominant ethos that have driven education in the past and are driving them now. Here's one view that is emerging:

- In the 1960s and 70s education in England and Wales was driven by **uninformed professionalism**.
- In the 1980s and 1990s it was driven by **uninformed prescription**.
- In the 2000s it needs to be driven by **informed professionalism**.

So what is “informed professionalism” is supposed to be? When I heard this phrase it connected in my mind with ideas coming out of the General Teaching Council. The GTC may not have had a good start as far as teachers are concerned, but their vision of what teachers ought to be is clearly one of people who are much more in the driving seat of education, who are involved in curriculum development, research, peer group assessment and training, resource development, the dissemination of evidence about teaching and learning. It seems to me that the DfES’s little sound bite of history here is pointing in the same direction. It’s saying that we will never have what they like to call “a world class education system” unless teachers are back in the driving seat; unless your professionalism, and your knowledge about how teaching and learning really work, are at the centre of educational policy.

I’m told that this view is one shared by the Secretary of State; however I’m also told that it is by no means shared across Government, or amongst their advisers. There are plenty who continue to believe in a simplistic, bicycle-pump model of teaching and learning, driven by basic prescriptive formulas, no doubt helped along with whizzy bits of new technology; and that teachers ought to do as they’re told, and get on with it.

So those who hold to the “informed professionalism” idea have an enormous mountain of opposition to climb over. They’re faced not only with hostility – and indeed incomprehension – at high levels of government and policy-making, but they’re also faced with profound cynicism and indifference from the profession itself. Those 15 years of uninformed prescription have taken their toll. Remember also that in those same 15 years there’s been a more than 50% turnover of people leaving the profession and others joining it. Plenty of teachers – and no doubt many of you – have never known anything other than uninformed prescription. The result is that many teachers have pessimistic – and now possibly exaggerated – notions of the power and control that government can actually exert over their daily practice.

Media teachers have a particular version of that kind of cynicism. It is traditionally assumed in this sector that we have to struggle to defend our corner and that everyone is against us, because we’re encouraging kids to be critical of “the system”. I have to say, I really believe that’s out of date. My perspective in a national organization may be different from yours, but I don’t see the kind of hostility to media studies that I used to see only a few years ago. Even the media themselves, to whom the very words “media studies” used to be a joke, have had the wind taken out of their sails by their own working party, the Audio-Visual Industries Training Group, which found that media students did rather better than other graduates in getting employment, and that 37% of freelancers in TV have media-related qualifications. As Jenny Grahame said yesterday, Media Studies has now reached a level of acceptance and recognition that it used not to have.

I’m not here to argue the case for the DfES or the GTC. My job is to be constantly scanning these twists and turns in thinking and attitudes at policy level and to try and spot where there may be opportunities to argue the case

for media education. I think that right now there are some very interesting opportunities that might be exploited in the interests of learners and teachers.

There are two big consultations going on at the moment that could very substantially affect the future role of media studies at GCSE. They are:

- The Green Paper on 14-19 Education (DfES)  
[www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk) - consultation ends 31<sup>st</sup> May
- The Draft Communications Bill (DCMS)  
[www.communicationsbill.gov.uk](http://www.communicationsbill.gov.uk) - consultation ends 2<sup>nd</sup> August

One of the things that have struck me most about the Green Paper is its lack of balance between problems and solutions. It's extremely clear about the problems. We're lagging behind Germany and France in the proportion of the population that gets Level 2 qualifications; 25% of the 16-18 age group is no longer in education, only 50% enter higher education and of those, fewer than 20% are from lower income groups. So something is happening in secondary schools, that turns far too many young people into dropouts and failures. And what is it that we have in our secondary school system that no other European country does? A massive public examinations hurdle at age 16. The Green Paper doesn't, of course, have the bottle to come right out and say that GCSE is a disaster. This is where we get the slippage into vague solutions:

1.23 The curriculum needs to become more flexible and responsive to students' individual needs. It must motivate them so they stay in learning and it must challenge the most able. For some this entails providing more and better vocational opportunities. For others it means beginning advanced level study early, either alongside GCSE programmes or by skipping GCSEs in some subjects. For yet another group it may mean taking more time to reach a higher level of attainment. All pathways should potentially lead to an overarching award at age 18/19 that recognises and records young people's achievements.

2.2 GCSEs and equivalent qualifications will continue to have an important role but will over time evolve into a progress check around the midpoint of the 14-19 phase.

So...what will we have then? Well, there'll be no more "one size fits all", declares Estelle Morris in her introduction. We've got to be more flexible, and meet the needs and aspirations of individual pupils, and we've got to achieve real parity of esteem between vocational and academic strands. How? Well, there'll be a wider range of options from age 14 and a focus on outcomes at 19 rather than 16. And what sort of outcomes might these be? Well...

3.30 New hybrid qualifications could be produced that, through the use of a common core and optional

general or vocational units, allow single specifications for general, mixed or largely vocational options.

And who will produce these qualifications? Well, the DfES says it will welcome suggestions for these and indeed for the whole management of this new, flexible, individualized 14-19 provision. They will fund more pathfinder schools and partnerships to explore what the possibilities might be; they've set aside £38 million for that.

It would be easy to be cynical about this. But it would also be a lost opportunity. I don't think this is simply a matter of the government being a bit vague and timid. If you line up these kinds of proposal with the "informed professionalism" agenda, you could read the vagueness of the Green Paper does as not standing for timidity and incompetence, but as avoiding head-on conflict with different educational philosophies and inviting teachers and schools to seize the initiative. Now that could easily turn out to be a wrong reading. But should that preclude any attempt to seize the initiative? I don't see what we have to lose by trying. One way of ensuring the worst possible outcomes will be to do nothing.

Before I suggest what one initiative might be, let's first look at what the curriculum might consist of. First of all, the National Curriculum goes straight out of the window. English, maths, science and ICT are still the core, and schools still have to find some way of providing citizenship, RE, careers, sex education and PE. Beyond that, all we have is the new phrase "entitlement of access" to modern foreign languages, design and technology, arts and humanities. We also have an encouragement to think outside the subject boxes, to strive after the "flexibility", "individual learning plans" and "hybrid qualifications" that are being flagged up. Again, it's really extraordinarily tentative.

However, the DfES is not the only part of government that has things to say about what people ought to be learning. Just a couple of weeks ago the DCMS published its Draft Communications Bill, which when it becomes law will set up a new regulatory body, OFCOM, that will take over the functions of existing bodies such as the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Commission. Interestingly, it won't include the British Board of Film and Video Classification, although it is required to work closely with the BBFC, and it will have some responsibility for films shown on TV. Its main role will be regulating the broadcasting industries and what they call "electronic publishing", which includes games and the Internet.

But OFCOM will also have a new responsibility: for media literacy. This is the first time that any agency directly responsible to government has been given explicit statutory responsibility for media literacy. The reason that they have been given this responsibility is that all regulatory bodies are increasingly aware that old-fashioned regulation – censorship, classification, watershed etc – can no longer be expected to work (if they ever did). There is therefore a conventional rhetoric at large in these sectors which says that education must have a role to play in helping people to use media responsibly (as usual, when society finds itself faced with an impossible task, it gives it to teachers).

The wording in the Bill is very roundabout, but it is basically saying that OFCOM can do whatever it thinks it needs to do to ensure that people understand the media, how they work, and how they are regulated. There is more detail about what this could mean in practice in a paper that the DCMS published last year called a Statement on Media Literacy. It is a bit protectionist but is recognizably related to the kinds of ideas that inform Media Studies. Here's how they define the abilities that would constitute what they call "Critical Viewing Skills:

- The ability to distinguish fact from fiction.
- The ability to identify and appreciate different levels of realism...both within and between genres.
- A better understanding of the actual mechanisms of production and distribution of TV programmes, CD-Rom games, films, interactive software, web sites etc, enabling finer judgments of quality and context, and firmer intellectual self-defence against varieties of manipulation, invasiveness and propaganda".
- The ability to differentiate reportage from advocacy.
- Awareness and assessment of commercial messages within programmes (product placement etc) and a critical approach to advertising
- An awareness of the economic and presentational imperatives that underlie news management; developing an understanding of the often tacit commercial and cultural pressures which dictate choice of stories.
- The ability consciously to explain and justify media preferences, enabling wider perspectives of choice and critical distance from a plethora of media options.

The protectionist agenda is somewhat modified by two references to the creative possibilities of the new media, and the Statement does say that media literacy will be "a necessity" in schools. Apart from seeing this as linked to Citizenship and PHSE, it says that "consideration of how media literacy might be covered within these initiatives must be left to DfES and teachers" and it goes on to mention the *bfi's* publication, *Moving Images in the Classroom*, as "the most recent and comprehensive guide".

When we come to the wording of the Bill itself we find "media literacy" rather more firmly buried in the protectionist agenda:

### **Draft Communications Bill**

#### **Clause10 Function of promoting media literacy**

(1) It shall be a function of OFCOM to take such steps, and to enter into such arrangements, as appear to them calculated to secure:

- (a) the development of a better public understanding of the nature and characteristics of material published by means of the electronic media;

- (b) the development of a better public awareness and understanding of the processes by which such material is selected, or made available, for publication by such means;
- (c) the development of a better public awareness of the available systems by which access to material published by means of the electronic media is or can be regulated;
- (d) the development of a better public awareness of the available systems by which persons to whom such material is made available may control what is received and of the uses to which such systems may be put;
- (e) the development of technologies and systems for regulating access to such material, and for facilitating control over what material is received, that are both more effective and easier to use; and
- (f) the promotion of the use of those technologies and systems.

Clearly only the first two of these functions relates to media education is we know it. The rest puts a rather stronger protectionist slant on the idea of “media literacy” than I think any of us would want to accept. For example, (d) could be seen as simply referring to the “off” switch and (e) and (f) to developing something like the V-chip, but that actually works, and Internet filters. Of course it remains to be seen how OFCOM will interpret these functions, and how they will relate to existing providers of education, from the DfES down. But the civil servants in charge of drafting the Bill assure me, that it is their intention that OFCOM’s functions should relate closely to the Statement on Media Literacy. The draft Bill is out for consultation until 2<sup>nd</sup> August and you have the contact details in your handout.

There is a halfway credible scenario in both of these consultations, which is that both the DfES and the DCMS really will welcome advice on curricular content and new approaches to teaching and learning. And even if they aren’t, what’s to be lost by giving it to them anyway? I think there is an absolutely crucial opportunity here to take the initiative and offer ways of constructively linking together all the concerns that these two consultations flag up. The offer may not be taken up; the real policy outcomes from these consultations may be considerably less than one might hope, but that’s not a reason for not having a go.

I’m going to discuss with colleagues both inside and outside the *bfi* this week, to see if we can put together an “expression of interest” to the DfES for a media-centred pathfinder initiative. It would have to be sent to them by the end of next week, 31<sup>st</sup> May, so some fast talking has to take place. But we do have some good starting points already in some of the *bfi*’s existing activities and partnerships.

We are in the middle of planning a meeting with a number of people from the DfES to discuss some issues that we have raised with them and want to pursue:

- Developing teacher guidance and a learning progression model for moving image education in the primary school
- Funding from the DfES for initial teacher training for media studies teachers
- Setting up a developmental project with a group of schools to put into practice some of the ideas proposed in *Moving Images in the Classroom*, our cross-curricular guide for secondary teachers

We have joined up with the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Commission to fund a survey of “media literacy” work in secondary schools, as a way of preparing some of the ground for OFCOM’s assumption of responsibility for media literacy. This will obviously include looking at media studies as well as at media within English and other subjects in the National Curriculum. This is a UK-wide study that is also looking at media literacy activity in Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish schools. It’s concentrating on talking to advisers and examination boards and on drawing together existing evidence because it doesn’t have the time or the money to do original research in schools, but it’s important to do this because that evidence – from OFSTED, from various university studies, from the European Union and from UNESCO – has never has been drawn together before. It’s interesting that our research team is encountering a lot of interest and enthusiasm. For example, OFSTED are giving them total co-operation, which is something that would not have happened under their previous management! That research will be complete by the end of July.

Because we’ve been working with the specialist media arts colleges and because we’ve also been involved in evaluating the digital video editing project that BECTa set up in 50 UK schools (on both of these working closely with Andrew Burn here at the Institute of Education), we can claim to have a reasonably good view of what happens when schools start to use digital video technology in purposeful ways and on a larger or more sustained basis than one-off film-making projects or just within Media Studies. We also have a number of teachers working with us to study the use of DVE in schools, funded by the DfES’s Best Practice scholarships. With this kind of evidence behind us we can more effectively argue to policy-makers that ICT-based work with moving images is distinctive. It’s not just “more ICT”; it hasn’t been covered in the NOF training; it needs to be separately and properly assessed by people who know what they’re looking at. This message is beginning to get through.

So what might this “pathfinder initiative” involve? First of all it would have to involve a range of partners. The *bfi*’s specialism is moving image media; we’d need other agencies with specialisms in other areas of media. Pathfinders are also meant to be looking at teaching and assessing the whole 14-19 curriculum so it would have to be looking at media across the curriculum as well as a core specialism. It might also have to be distinct from specialist media arts colleges, or at least include schools that weren’t in that category, because what pathfinders are supposing to explore is what might be relevant for a very wide range of schools, not just those who’d chosen a particular specialism.

So I'm speculating about a partnership of schools and other agencies, maybe in different places and networked, maybe all in one area. It might be an initiative that sat within one of the existing funded initiatives like Excellence in Cities or Creative Partnerships, or it might deliberately avoid those.

Essentially this initiative would have to be addressing the questions that are raised by the Green Paper:

- How do we offer a more diverse and relevant curriculum for all students in KS4 and beyond?
- How can we get away from the one big hurdle of GCSE and provide meaningful and rigorous assessment of progress through KS3 and 4 without setting up constant and even more stressful testing?
- How can we ensure that students aren't penalized for trying out different pathways and then changing them? (this is not actually emphasized in the Green Paper but I think it's a problem!)
- If teachers are going to be involved in developing curriculum, resources, qualifications and training, how will they still find time to teach?
- Substantial amounts of professional development are implied in these changes: how will that be funded?
- How can we abolish the vocational-academic divide?

But at the same time we'd have our own questions to address in this particular pathfinder:

- How can media study contribute to a more diverse and relevant curriculum for 14-19 year olds?
- How can schools best provide the kind of "media literacy" called for by the DCMS?
- Can media study broaden and diversify without compromising its principles and strengths?
- Could a "media-led" course and qualification (or series of modules) incorporate part or all of the core subjects of English and ICT?
- Could a "media-led" course and qualification incorporate "entitlement of access" to aspects of arts and humanities, modern foreign languages, design and technology?
- Could media courses incorporate the Green Paper's requirements for "education with character" ie personal and moral responsibilities, citizenship, community awareness?

**Are you interested in this idea? Would your school want to be involved in such an initiative? Get in touch!**

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