

Harmful Content on the Internet and in Video Games
New Inquiry

Submission from the

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Harmful Content on the Internet and in Video Games: New Inquiry

1. Executive Summary

- The UK Film Council is the Government backed lead agency for film
- The UK Film Council is a founder member of the Media Literacy Task Force and supports the Task Force submission to the Byron Review as relevant to this new Select Committee Inquiry, emphasising as it does the central importance of media literacy in giving all users their best protection from harmful or unwanted content online
- In addition, the UK Film Council wishes to emphasise the importance of the internet for the development of creativity and talent in relation to the film and moving image content industries and value chain in the digital age
- The UK Film Council would further like to draw the attention of the Select Committee to the impressive media literacy and film education work carried out in the Nations and Regions of the UK
- The UK Film Council submits that, whilst everyone and particularly young people must be safe and appropriately safeguarded, all citizens should, as an entitlement, also be educated, encouraged and positively supported in their creative and critical use of the internet and video games.

2. Background

The UK Film Council is the Government backed lead agency for film in the UK ensuring that the economic, cultural and educational aspects of film are effectively represented at home and abroad. Our goal is to help make the UK a global hub for film in the digital age, with the world's most imaginative, diverse and vibrant film culture, underpinned by a flourishing, competitive film industry.

The UK Film Council does not just work to ensure British films get made and that British studios and skills stay competitive. The cultural and educational aspects of film are equally important drivers both of its policy and funding priorities. The UK Film Council believes that having access to a diverse choice of films and moving image, enjoying them, understanding them, perhaps even making them should be open to everyone in the UK.

3. Key Issues

The UK Film Council is a founder member of the Media Literacy Task Force and supports its submission to the Byron Review as given in the Appendix attached.

In addition, however, it wishes to emphasise the importance of the internet for the development of creativity and expression in all citizens, and of talent in relation to the film and moving image content industries and value chain.

The Charter for Media Literacy describes a media literate person as someone who understands all "3 C s":

- Being creative
- Being critical
- Being culturally aware.

This rich competence and confidence in using the internet and new digital media is vital to the development of new business models for the production, distribution and consumption of film and moving image content. This confidence will increasingly be in the future an essential pre-requisite for use of the internet as a fertile training ground for talent. Learning to make choices about content available online, and to understand the 'message' being communicated – is part of what being media literate means. Being supported and resourced, either in a formal school setting or informally through the help given by content providers and manufacturers, by other agencies, or in the home, to become media literate is therefore the responsibility of government, the media industries, educators and parents – and citizens themselves.

This is an urgent need and most particularly in the face of violent, pornographic or unwanted content which will otherwise remain so until audiences, users and consumers acting as responsible citizens are empowered to make informed choices themselves. Regulation of still relatively uncharted online territories is proving difficult, though the media industries' self and co-regulation should definitely continue be encouraged. Codes of Practice and other means of ensuring responsible content and effective means of classification or warning are potentially useful. Nonetheless developing media literacy skills from an early age will, the UK Film Council maintains, provide a better long term strategy for addressing these challenges.

Whilst the UK Film Council, therefore, accepts the need for legal safeguards, self and co-regulation in the access to content – and indeed the film industry has worked successfully with such safeguards (in the UK principally through the work of the British Board of Film Classification), it nonetheless also maintains that encouraging responsible and creative use of media through both formal and informal education, through wide access to information about the nature of content, as well as by other means that producers and distributors of creative content have developed, is of paramount importance and of greater effectiveness.

The UK Film Council would like to draw the attention of the Select Committee to the impressive media literacy and film education work carried out in the Nations and Regions of the UK, particularly by the British Film Institute and the film

agencies of the National and Regional Screen Agencies. For examples of their work see: <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/information/aboutus/partnersandregions/>

The work of First Light Movies is of particular relevance since it engages young people in a critical understanding of film through the practical process of making movies. Its innovative website for younger audiences is especially of note: www.filmstreet.co.uk

This wealth of experience, expertise and best practice might well provide models and insights in how to engage people through creative activity and critical understanding that can be of value to the Select Committee. Such educational work fosters competencies in people which empower them to use the 'language' of media and thus to be more fully literate in today's world.

Increasingly film and video games are finding synergies and connections which inspire and sustain each other in the market place. These models are also being explored by the National and Regional Screen Agencies to the benefit of both industries and the mutual exploitation of talent.

It is, therefore, of vital importance for the creative economy as well as for the cultural life of the UK in the twenty-first century that everyone is encouraged to become media literate.

4. Conclusion

The UK Film Council submits in relation to any Recommendations the Select Committee might make in concerning people's use of the internet:

- That everyone has a right to be safe and appropriately safeguarded online
- That everyone should also have an entitlement to be educated and informed to make the most of their use of the internet and online content
- That formal education should address this entitlement through the support of adequately trained teachers
- That informal opportunities for learning in a media rich society should be encouraged by government so that everyone can access and enjoy creative and potentially economically productive experiences online .

Carol Comley
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Appendix:

The Byron Review of the Internet and Video Games Submission from the Media Literacy Task Force

1. Executive summary

- It is important to recognise that the concept of ‘media literacy’ is about having a confident and critical understanding of media and an ability to use it creatively, which includes but goes well beyond technical proficiency
- Being media literate means parents and children are informed and empowered in relation to media in the contemporary world which is the right of every citizen
- This empowerment fosters a use of media which develops the capability to protect oneself and others from harm – as well as to enjoy new technologies and benefit from them for learning, personal development and entrepreneurial activity
- Advancing media literacy is thus a collaborative responsibility of government, the media industries, educators and cultural agencies, as well as of parents and children themselves.

2. About the Media Literacy Task Force and the Charter for Media Literacy

The Media Literacy Task Force was set up in 2004 with the support of the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in 2004. It has been chaired until December 2007 by Heather Rabbatts, CBE. It comprises senior representatives of the BBC, the British Board of Film Classification, the British Film Institute, Channel Four, ITV, the Media Education Association, Skillset and the UK Film Council. DCMS, Ofcom, the Broadband Stakeholder Group and Andrea Millwood-Hargrave sit as observers.

In November 2005, James Purnell MP (then Minister for Creative Industries and Tourism) together with a number of leading figures from the Nations and Regions in education, the film, television and media industries, launched a Charter for Media Literacy. The Charter explains what being media literate today means as well as priorities for developing this, particularly in relation to moving image media and content. The text of the Charter was widely consulted upon, both within the UK and Europe, and many individuals and agencies in education, cultural organisations, the media and communications industries have since pledged their support (for the full text of the Charter, its context, and a list of current signatories see www.medialiteracy.org.uk). The Charter is also championed across Europe by a

further group and has signatories from at least 19 other countries (see www.euromedialiteracy.eu for information).

Details of the launch event, and other related documents, are available to download at: <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/information/downloads/?subject=20>

The Task Force:

- Sees ‘media literacy’ as part of a wider definition of ‘literacy’ in the C21st and not as a separate set of skills or competencies
- Is committed to ensuring a combination of creative, cultural and critical competencies (the Charter’s 3 C’s) for all users in relation to their full and productive use of media
- Believes these competencies and skills should be an entitlement, not a privilege, and available to all throughout their lives
- Aims to encourage full, purposeful and creative use of the internet and media, including the confidence and competence to respond or question, complain about or object, to content or services on behalf of themselves, their families or communities – whether geographic, cultural or related to disability, age, gender or sexuality
- Thinks that collaboration between government, educators, the media and communication industries and cultural agencies is the best route to developing media literacy effectively with parents, children and others.

3. Key issues

The Media Literacy Task Force recognises the complexity of the issues involved and the problems in striking the appropriate balance between the rights and responsibilities of individuals. It also recognises that Government and regulators have a role to play, not just through legislation or direct regulation, but by encouraging enlightened and responsible behaviour by stakeholders. The Task Force also believes that there are some basic key issues that the Review needs to consider.

These issues, in the view of the Task Force, underpin approaches to answering the specific questions asked by the Review:

To what extent do children, young people and parents understand and manage those risks and how can they be supported to do so?

What, if anything, could be changed in order to help children, young people and parents manage the potential or actual risks?

- It is important to recognise that 'media literacy' is about the confident, critical understanding of media, its cultural context, and the creative use of it as well as technical proficiency
- Developing this critical confidence and understanding is one of the best ways of ensuring protection from harm
- Media literacy is also concerned with ensuring equality of access and advancing diversity
- Media literacy should be seen as an entitlement that is relevant right across the curriculum in schools – not just as a separate subject or activity. Media literacy, therefore, needs to be an integral part of all teachers' training and continuing professional development
- Key media sectors should be encouraged to collaborate via their trade and professional bodies, or in other ways, in order to deliver media literacy outcomes
- Annual reporting on progress, and possibly Action Plans, should be encouraged within each media industry and cultural sector groupings to strengthen commitment to media literacy work. This model has worked well, for example, in the Employers' Forum on Disability.

Heather Rabbatts CBE

Chair, Media Literacy Task Force

November 2007