

Media literacy, the coalition government, and Jeremy Hunt

For many who had worked for years in the field of media literacy, it seemed a triumph that the [2003 Communications Act](#) required Ofcom to promote media literacy. It had become clear that in a fast changing world where media matters more than ever, users no longer rely on gatekeepers, and there is an urgent need to skill up. Immediately, a debate was sparked – what is media literacy, how can it be promoted, how can it be measured, and what is the value of media literacy? But, since the Coalition Government came to power last year, it seems that everything has gone quiet. For our answers to these questions, see the [dossier on media literacy](#) and the [Communications Act, 2003](#).

Ofcom is scaling back its activities in this area, the ambitions sketched out in the [Digital Britain Report](#) have been quietly dropped, and attention is returning to the more prosaic though still important task of getting the British public online in the first place, with fewer questions asked about what they will do, or know, or misunderstand once they are online.

To find out what the Government plans, I wrote to Secretary of State Jeremy Hunt in January and I received this [reply](#) in March. He says,

“I can assure you that the Government remains fully committed to the ongoing development and promotion of media literacy in the UK.”

But then he points to the need for economic cuts, resulting in “a phased reduction in our support for Ofcom’s media literacy work.”

In our recent [expert seminar](#), concerns were expressed that efforts to enhance critical, creative and participatory literacies will wane. Hunt’s letter certainly gives these crucial elements of media literacy little weight, instead noting that current policies do incorporate some degree of media literacy skills in the school curriculum (although whether and how this is done is left up to schools) and enhance child safety protections via the [UK Council for Child Internet Safety](#) and the [Bailey Review](#). Except in relation to such specific activities as vocational education and the work of the BBC, he does not show how media literacy is to be enhanced among the adult population. But adults as well as children, surely, are grappling – with more or less success – with our complex and fast-changing media environment.

In our forthcoming work, we will examine why this matters, who is getting left behind, and what we think should happen next.

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