

Changing life stories

A National Literacy Trust evaluation report



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About NewsWise

The Guardian Foundation, the National Literacy Trust and the PSHE Association developed the NewsWise programme in 2018, based on a shared mission to create a generation of news literate children. The programme aims to empower children with the skills and knowledge to engage with news, to feel confident to ask questions and to challenge misinformation, and to share their own values and opinions in a fair, responsible and truthful way.



Credit: Leon Edler/ NewsWise

NewsWise provides free, high-quality and cross-curricular news literacy education resources, experiences and support for schools and families. These include teacher training and webinars, newsroom-style pupil workshops, opportunities for pupils to meet and hear from journalism students and professionals, lesson plans and online resources, including a Family News Hub. Funding from organisations including Google and the Garfield Weston Foundation allows the programme to be offered free to all settings teaching 9 to 11-year-olds across the UK.

The digital elements of the programme expanded significantly in 2021-21 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the essential work of the programme could continue despite school closures. In 2019, the NewsWise programme received a Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Award from UNESCO¹; in 2020, a Nesta Democracy Pioneers award²; and in 2021, a WAN-IFRA European Digital Media award³.

³ <u>https://wan-ifra.org/2021/07/wan-ifra-announces-2021-european-digital-media-awards-winners/</u>



¹ <u>https://en.unesco.org/news/transformative-initiatives-celebrated-global-media-and-information-literacy-awards-2019</u>

² <u>https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/meet-19-pioneers-shaking-democracy/</u>

Executive summary

This report evaluates the impact of the third year of NewsWise, from August 2020 to July 2021⁴. This period was affected by school closures and ongoing educational disruption in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Adaptations were made to programme delivery in March 2020, such as providing teacher training and pupil workshops online rather than face-to-face, and the NewsWise team also developed teacher webinars and digital news literacy resources to support schools with remote learning. Further developments in year three included the establishment of a journalist volunteering element of the programme.

Virtual delivery remained necessary for the academic year 2020-2021. During this time, the NewsWise team delivered virtual workshops to **1,878** pupils in **35** primary schools serving areas of disadvantage across the UK, giving them the chance to learn about news, improve their news literacy skills and prepare their own news reports. In addition, **81** teachers received pre-project online training, **213** accessed webinars and **274** took part in other online training events. Finally, **58,368** free resources were downloaded, including curriculum-based lesson plans, classroom materials and family activity packs. This was almost double the number of downloads made in the previous year.

As this report shows, pupils taking part in NewsWise showed increased interest in the news, greater critical engagement and improved skills when navigating news. The percentage of pupils who say they were interested in news almost doubled (from 35.5% to 67.4%) following participation in the NewsWise workshop. Similarly, the percentage of pupils saying they would check whether a new story came from a person or organisation they trusted almost doubled (45.1% vs. 82.5%) over the course of the programme. While just a third (32.1%) of pupils were able to correctly identify two or more stories out of three in the pre-NewsWise quiz, this **more than doubled** to **73.8%** after taking part in NewsWise. Findings suggest that virtual delivery of the workshops was as effective as the in-person workshops delivered in Years 1 and 2.

85.7% of teachers who took part in a NewsWise teacher training session said that they would recommend it to other schools, and one teacher described the NewsWise workshop as "one of the best literacy-based workshops I have been a part of". Another teacher stated:

"I have rarely seen children so engaged. They saw the power of the media in changing minds. They realised that they **aren't powerless**, that news organisations can **change governments' minds**."



⁴ For evaluations of the first and second year, see <u>Cappellini & Picton (2019)</u> and <u>Picton et al., (2020)</u>



Summary of key findings

Pupils have improved news literacy behaviour

At the end of the programme, more than double the number of participating pupils say they would check whether a news story was reported by other news companies (32.8% to 75.0%) while the percentage saying they would check whether a news story came from a news company or a person they trusted increased from 41.5% to 82.1%.

Pupils have increased news literacy skills

- The percentage of pupils who were able to correctly identify whether news stories in a news quiz were fake or real **more than doubled**. Before NewsWise, **32.1%** of pupils scored two points or more out of three in the quiz; this increased to **73.8%** at the end of the programme.
- Conversely, the percentage of pupils unable to correctly identify any of the three stories in the news quiz decreased from **32.4%** to **7.0%**.

Pupils are more confident navigating the news

While a third (32.9%) of pupils felt it was 'easy' or 'very easy' to tell whether a news story is trustworthy before taking part in NewsWise, this increased to 9 in 10 (90.7%) after the programme. This compares with a national average of 60.3% of Key Stage 2 pupils who say they find it easy.

Pupils have increased interest in the news; however, active engagement decreased marginally over the course of the project

- The number of pupils interested in the news **almost doubled** following participation in the NewsWise workshop, with the percentage of pupils interested in the news rising from **35.5%** to **67.4%**.
- The percentage of pupils who read, watched or listened to the news either daily or weekly decreased slightly from 60.4% at the time of the workshop to 57.4% in post-NewsWise surveys carried out several weeks later. This echoes findings from wider UK research, which found some children and young people disengaged with the news during the COVID pandemic (<u>Ofcom, 2021</u>).

Pupils have an increased critical awareness of the elements of trustworthy news

• After taking part in NewsWise, the percentage of pupils who believed news stories should be balanced increased from **34.0%** to **66.0%**. Similarly, the percentage of pupils who felt that news should be truthful increased from **41.2%** to **58.8%**.

Teachers found the training high quality and believed the programme had a positive impact on pupils' news literacy skills and confidence

- 9 in 10 (92.8%) of teachers rated the NewsWise online pre-project training as 'excellent' (46.4%) or 'good' (46.4%) and 100.0% felt more confident in supporting pupils' news literacy.
- **100.0%** of teachers feel pupils have increased skills in thinking critically about news, while **91.7%** say pupils are more likely to use more than one source to check facts.
- 100% rated the teacher webinars as 'excellent' (78.1%) or 'good' (21.9%).



Introduction

Over the last decade, the rise of digital technology has brought unprecedented change in how news is created and experienced. The impact of misinformation has been a growing concern, with calls for children and young people's critical, media and news literacy skills to be improved to help them navigate the contemporary news environment.



Credit: Leon Edler/ NewsWise

Research shows that, while children and young people have grown up in a digital world, many may lack the knowledge and skills to assess the reliability of the information they find online. For example, research conducted by the National Literacy Trust in 2017 found only 2% of UK pupils surveyed could correctly identify fake and real news stories. In addition, pupils from higher-income households performed better than those from lower-income households⁵.

Furthermore, the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey 2019 indicated that pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) have lower levels of confidence and engagement with news than their more advantaged peers⁶, suggesting that the targeted approach taken by NewsWise provides much-needed resources for children who can benefit the most from support in this area.

The NewsWise project model

The Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools, run by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy and the National Literacy Trust, identified several areas of need in relation to improving children and young people's ability to engage effectively with the digital news environment (2018)⁷. These included time, training, resources (including real-world examples of news to equip children with relevant experience in interpreting and evaluating news sources) and experience in creating news⁸. The NewsWise programme was designed to respond to these findings, providing expert teacher training, workshops and resources to develop children's news literacy skills and give them authentic opportunities to get involved in the production of news. In particular, the NewsWise workshop creates a 'newsroom' experience in schools, with pupils taking on editorial roles, identifying trustworthy stories and creating news reports in real time. A recent review of media literacy interventions noted that 'system 2' (slower, critical-rational) thinking, evaluation strategies and knowledge of the operation of news industries have "consistently been found to have positive effects on the ability to critically engage with misinformation"⁹. Support for all of these elements of critical engagement are present in the NewsWise programme.

⁹ Edwards et al., (2021)



⁵ National Literacy Trust (2018)

⁶ Cappellini & Picton (2019)

⁷ National Literacy Trust (2018)

⁸ See also Picton and Teravainen (2017)

Outputs

In the third year of the project (August 2020 – July 2021), NewsWise reached a total of 1,878 pupils and 568 teachers in 35 primary schools. Since its inception, the NewsWise programme has reached 8,069 children, 152 schools, 2,242 teachers and 107 parents or carers across the UK.

Schools are invited to take part in the NewsWise programme based on their level of need. To take part in a NewsWise workshop and teacher training, a school must:

- Have a higher than average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)
- Be located in an area of high literacy vulnerability¹⁰
- Be located in an area that is typically under-represented in the mainstream media

The average percentage of pupils eligible for FSM across the 35 primary schools that participated in NewsWise was 25.3%, well above the national average of 17.3%¹¹. **Figure 1** shows the distribution of schools visited. NewsWise was delivered in primary schools in England, Scotland and Wales and achieved a diverse geographical spread.

Figure 1: NewsWise reach in 2020-21



Thanks to funding from organisations including Google and the Garfield Weston Foundation, digital NewsWise resources such as posters, tips and curriculum-based lesson plans are available free to every primary school in the UK. This has enabled the project to reach many more children who may not otherwise have had an opportunity to take part in a project like NewsWise, including those from areas of socioeconomic deprivation. To date, **94,042** free online resources have been downloaded, including curriculum-based lesson plans, classroom materials and family activity packs.

¹¹ N.B. this was the 2020 national average - see <u>Department for Education (2021)</u>



¹⁰ See <u>National Literacy Trust (2017)</u>

Evaluation methodology

NewsWise objectives

NewsWise aims to reach children from a diverse range of communities in order to:

- Deepen their understanding of why and how news is produced. Children will:
 - Learn about reasons for news (e.g. information sharing, income generation, other agendas)
 - Develop their awareness of different aspects of news (factual, opinion, regulated, unregulated), different news formats and media outlets, and what journalists and news producers do (fact checking, editing, etc.)
- Enable them to navigate the news through active and critical engagement
 - Active engagement (e.g. experience of learning about news, interest in news)
 - Critical engagement: skills and confidence (e.g. ability to think critically about news stories [i.e. to assess, analyse and evaluate] and confidence to question authority)
- Empower them to tell their own news stories
 - \circ $\;$ Increased ability and confidence to create and share their own news

Based on the *Read On. Get On.* (ROGO) Index¹², a robust measure of children's reading at age 11, the NewsWise programme evaluation uses a tripartite model to integrate the elements that contribute to the development of a news literate child (see **Figure 2**). These consist of:

- News literacy skills (including understanding what news is and how it is produced, how to find news, what 'good' news reporting looks like, signs of 'fake' news, recognising fact, opinion, rumour and speculation)
- Affective processes (such as attitudes, confidence and motivation)
- **News literacy behaviours** (engagement with the news, including consumption, questioning, checking, discussing etc.)

Figure 2: The tripartite model of news literacy



¹² <u>https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/read-on-get-on/rogo-index/</u>

This model reflects the complementary roles of affective and behavioural aspects in supporting news literacy skills, and additionally takes into account that some aspects may change more visibly within the life of the intervention than others. Elements of each aspect are described in more detail below (see **Figure 3**) through the concept of the 'news literate child' developed by the NewsWise programme team in early 2019.

Figure 3: The news literate child



To evaluate outcomes reached through workshops and resources, changes in news literacy are measured over the course of the project through child self-perception, teacher perception and skills testing (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4: Evaluation time points



Affective and behavioural elements are evaluated through survey questions designed to explore awareness of topics such as how news is created, news literacy behaviours and confidence to question the news. Skills are evaluated through a short news quiz comprising three examples of real and fake news at pre and post-testing points. The design of these measures was informed by validated approaches to measuring children's news literacy¹³. In addition, a small number of interviews were carried out with teachers who had participated in NewsWise approximately three months after their initial involvement with the programme.

¹³ See e.g. <u>Hobbs and Frost (2003);</u> <u>Hobbs and Frost (2017)</u>

These aimed to capture any longer-term outcomes that they might observe in their pupils' news literacy attitudes, behaviour or skills.

Sample

We received 1,122 responses to the pupil pre-NewsWise survey, an acceptable response rate in relation to 1,878 overall workshop participants (60%¹⁴). Post-workshop survey responses were received from **679** pupils. The response rate for the pupil post-NewsWise survey, administered several weeks after the workshop (typically after the unit of work had been completed) was better than in previous years, despite challenges such as many pupils having to self-isolate in summer term 2021, with **477** surveys received (around 25% of all participants). However, the number of responses that could be matched at post-workshop and post-programme points was still limited by attrition. For this reason, the following analysis of attitudinal and behavioural change is based on cohort level data, while the skills test sample will focus on the **343** pupils who could be matched through unique identifiers.

With regard to teachers, **28** of a possible 81 online teacher training feedback forms were completed (35%)¹⁵ and **24** post-NewsWise teacher surveys were received, reflecting the number of challenges faced by teachers in an exceptionally difficult time.

| | Time point and subject of survey | Purpose | Number completed |
|---------|--|--|---------------------------|
| Pupil | Pre-NewsWise quiz | To establish a baseline, allowing comparison with post-NewsWise pupil quiz | 1,122 (343 matched) |
| | Post-virtual workshop reflective survey | To evaluate short-term changes (i.e. over the course of the workshop) in pupils' news literacy | 679 |
| | Post-NewsWise survey and quiz | To evaluate longer-term changes (i.e. after the unit of work) and compare with pre-NewsWise quiz | 477 |
| Teacher | Post-online pre- project teacher training and workshop | To evaluate feedback from online teacher training sessions and pupil workshops | 28 |
| | Post-NewsWise | To evaluate longer-term changes (i.e. after the unit of work) in pupils' news literacy | 24 |

Figure 5: Evaluation samples for NewsWise

¹⁴ This figure includes two "one-off" events with schools who did not take part in the full programme so did not complete the evaluation - the figure not including these two events is 1,813

¹⁵ Not comparable with previous years as training had been face-to-face, allowing trainers to request forms to be completed directly after the session. Furthermore online training in Year 3 focused on class teachers running NewsWise rather than running a twilight CPD session open to all staff after a face-to-face workshop, as in previous years.

| | Post-NewsWise interview | To further evaluate longer-term changes in pupils' news literacy | 2 |
|-----------------------|--|---|-----|
| | Post-teacher webinar | To evaluate feedback from teacher webinar sessions | 114 |
| Student teacher | Post-ITT (Initial Teacher Training) survey | To gather feedback from teacher trainees on the impact of a specially designed training session | 52 |
| Student ambassador | Post-NewsWise volunteer survey | To evaluate journalism students' experience of supporting NewsWise projects | 2 |
| Family | Family pack survey | To evaluate feedback from free online resources provided during lockdown | 13 |

Notes on evaluation methodology and impact of COVID-19

While it was hoped that once pupils had returned to school in September 2020 workshops could be delivered face-to-face, for logistical reasons it was necessary to continue delivering training and pupil workshops through digital platforms for the entire academic year 2020-21. The number of pupil and teacher pre and post-workshop and project surveys received overall compared very well with previous years, however, as noted above, school closures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing educational disruption (such as teachers and groups of pupils needing to self-isolate) affected both programme delivery and the evaluation process.

For example, in Year 3, plans were made to recruit sufficient schools to act as a reasonable comparison for NewsWise pupils taking part in the news quiz. However, additional time pressures faced by teachers dealing with school closures and disruptions made this exceptionally difficult. Data gathered therefore proved insufficient to allow an appropriate comparison to be made. Plans to conduct longitudinal teacher interviews to measure longer-term impact or unexpected outcomes were also somewhat limited by similar challenges, with many teachers too busy to respond to contact or unable to complete the unit of work sufficiently to make the interviews representative.



Credit: David Levene/ The Guardian



Findings from pupils

Outcome 1: Pupils have improved news literacy behaviour

An important skill in news literacy is the ability to check whether a news story can be trusted, and one aspect of the progression of participants' news literacy skills was measured by capturing changes in behaviour when evaluating a news story. Pupils were found to be more likely to say that they would do a range of checks to verify news having taken part in NewsWise (see **Figure 6**).





For example, while just a third (32.8%) of pupils would check whether a story was reported by other news companies before taking part in NewsWise, three-quarters (75.0%) said that they would do this at the end of the project. A similarly dramatic jump is seen in relation to checking a news story came from a news company or a person children could trust. The percentage of pupils saying that they would check this doubled from 41.5% to 82.1% over the course of the project.

While almost half (47.3%) before taking part in NewsWise would have used visual clues, such as whether a photo looked real and had a caption, this too increased to two-thirds (65.7%) following the programme. This was an improvement on the previous year, when only half the pupils said they would perform this check when evaluating a news story before taking part, and the percentage decreased over the course of the project. Additional content on visual literacy was added to the virtual workshop in Year 3, given these findings, and the content will be carried forward into face-to-face workshops in due course.

Pupils were also invited to comment on checks they would make other than those suggested. The themes mentioned most frequently in pupils' comments included checking the date of the article (for example, in case it was 1 April), signs such as padlocks or ticks (to indicate the security of a site or verify a poster's identity), and whether the punctuation, spelling and vocabulary used appeared 'professional'.

Several also mentioned the "Stop, Question, Check, Decide" mantra featured in the NewsWise resources, which corresponds with the 'system 2' (slower, critical-rational) thinking identified as having positive effects on critical engagement "¹⁶.



Outcome 2: Pupils showed increased news literacy skills

Critical engagement with news, including the ability to "assess, analyse and evaluate" news stories, is one of the main objectives of the NewsWise programme. Children were asked to complete a test to assess their news literacy skills before and after taking part in NewsWise. This test included a news quiz that asked pupils to determine whether three pieces of age-appropriate news were fake or real.



Pupils were found to be significantly better at spotting fake news at the end of NewsWise than they were before taking part. As shown in **Figure 7**, the percentage of pupils who were able to tell whether news stories in the news quiz were fake or real **more than doubled**. 32.1% of pupils were able to correctly identify two or more stories out of three in the pre-NewsWise quiz and 73.8% of pupils were able to correctly identify two or more stories after taking part in NewsWise.





¹⁶ Edwards et al., (2021)

Conversely, the percentage of pupils who were unable to determine whether any of the news stories in the news quiz were fake or real decreased. Before NewsWise, almost a third (32.4%) scored 0 in the news quiz. However, after taking part just 7.0% of pupils scored 0 on the quiz.

Outcome 3: Pupils are more confident navigating the news

We know that confidence is an issue for pupils as, in the pre-survey, only a third (32.9%) of pupils said they find it 'quite easy' or 'very easy' to tell whether a piece of news is true (see **Figure 8**).



Figure 8: Pupils' confidence in being able to tell whether or not a news story is true

The workshop was very effective in boosting pupils' confidence. Indeed, following the workshop, the percentage of pupils who say it is 'very' or 'quite easy' to tell whether a news story is trustworthy increased from 32.9% to 86.2%, and increased further to 90.7% at the post-NewsWise survey point. Conversely, around 1 in 7 (14.3%) pupils said they found it 'very difficult' or 'quite difficult' to tell whether a news story is trustworthy, decreasing from 67.2% pre-NewsWise and decreasing further to just 1 in 10 (9.4%) at the end of the project.

Data from the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey 2021 indicate that NewsWise is helping to raise children's confidence in their news literacy skills above the national average. 90.7% of NewsWise participants say that they find it 'very' (36.7%) or 'quite' (54.0%) easy to tell whether a news story is trustworthy, compared with 60.3% of same-age pupils across the UK (13.2% 'very' and 47.1% 'quite' easy)¹⁷.

Pupils were asked about their confidence in reading news, spotting fake news and report a news story after taking part in the workshop and project. Post-workshop surveys indicate that more than 4 in 5 participants (84.6%) feel more confident about spotting fake news, more than 7 in 10 (73.8%) are more confident when it comes to reading news and 3 in 5 (58.9%)

¹⁷ The Annual Literacy Survey reached 42,502 respondents aged 8 to 18 in early 2021. Comparison is made with 3,699 Key Stage 2 pupils (aged 8 to 11), 2,952 of whom answered a question about news literacy confidence. 13.2% found it 'very easy', 47.1% 'quite easy', 32.0% 'quite difficult' and 7.7% 'very difficult'.

are more confident to report a news story (see **Figure 9**). These percentages remained similar at the post-NewsWise survey point, indicating that the Unit of Work sustains the impact of the workshop, and further increases pupils' confidence around reporting news.



Figure 9: Pupils' agreement with news literacy statements

Children's comments reflected an increased confidence in both consuming and creating news:

"I feel like I can now read a news story and know that I can trust that it is true."

"I definitely feel more confident writing news reports and presenting [them] knowing I'm capable of writing a proper report."

To provide further insight into children's confidence at the end of the NewsWise programme, pupils were asked how well they felt they could tell the difference between fact and opinion and whether they considered whose points of view had been included in news stories. Responses show that **4 in 5** (81.9%) pupils believe they are better at telling the difference between fact and option, while **7 in 10** (69.8%) say they now think about whose points of view have been included in a news story.

In addition, statements relating to children's scepticism and reasoning skills, developed with reference to Skillsbuilder¹⁸ questions, are included in pupil and teacher surveys. Pupil responses indicate a high level of confidence in knowledge around how to spot fake news, positive behaviour when evaluating news, and awareness of sources of trustworthy news (see **Figure 10**).

¹⁸ <u>https://www.skillsbuilder.org/</u>





Figure 10: Pupils' agreement with news literacy statements

Outcome 4: Pupils have increased interest in the news; however, active engagement decreased marginally over the course of the project

One of the most prominent findings from pupil surveys is that the NewsWise workshop is particularly effective in increasing pupils' engagement with news (see **Figure 11**). Indeed, the percentage of pupils who said that they were 'very interested' or 'quite interested' in news almost doubled between pre-project and post-workshop time points, increasing from 35.5% to 67.4%.





This was sustained at the post-project time point, which indicated that 59.6% of pupils remained 'very' or 'quite' interested in news several weeks after the workshop. Conversely, while 1 in 5 (20.0%) pupils said they were 'not at all' interested in news before taking part in the NewsWise workshop, this decreased to 7.5% after the workshop, and decreased further to 7.0% at the post-project time point.

Pupils were also asked how often they read, watched or listened to the news at the postworkshop survey point, and the post-NewsWise time point several weeks later. The percentage of pupils who engaged with the news either daily or weekly decreased marginally



over this time, from **60.4%** to **57.4%** (see **Figure 12**). However, this may reflect the nature of the news over 2020 and 2021, and echoes findings from wider UK surveys, which found that many young people reported disengaging from the news over the course of the coronavirus pandemic¹⁹.

Figure 12: Pupil responses to the question 'How often do you read, watch or listen to the news?'



Outcome 5: Pupils have increased critical awareness of the elements of

trustworthy news

Survey findings indicated that, having taken part in a NewsWise workshop, there were positive changes in pupils' critical awareness of the elements of trustworthy news. For example, after the NewsWise workshop a considerably higher percentage agree that news should present a balanced, fair and truthful picture (see **Figure 13**).



Figure 13: Pupils' understanding of what news should be

Increases before and after taking part in NewsWise were dramatic. For example, while just over a third (34.0%) of pupils believed that news stories should be balanced before taking part in NewsWise, this doubled to two-thirds (66.0%) after taking part. Similarly, while around 2 in 5 believed news should be fair (41.0%) and truthful (41.2%) before taking part, 3 in 5 (59.0%) believed this after participating in NewsWise.

Post-workshop Post-NewsWise

¹⁹ (see e.g. <u>Ofcom, 2021)</u>

Pupils' feedback on the NewsWise programme

Alongside measuring the learning outcomes outlined above, we were keen to hear what pupils thought about the NewsWise programme, and which aspects they found most and least enjoyable or interesting. Almost 7 in 10 (69.2%) pupils reported enjoying learning about news literacy through the NewsWise virtual workshop, with 30.3% saying it was 'very good' and 38.8% saying it was 'good'. While somewhat lower than the previous year (when 83.9% enjoyed the workshop) this most likely reflects that in 2020-21workshops were virtual rather than face-to-face. Indeed, almost all comments about aspects of the programme children didn't like related to sessions having to be virtual, while comments about what they did like most often highlighted interactive elements:

"It would have been nice to actually be with the person doing the workshop but we obviously can't do that right now."

"I didn't really like that it was virtual, I find it a lot more interesting when it is in person."

"I liked voting for the fake news or real news, and watching others performing their news shows."

"[I liked] when we did a live broadcast to the other class."

The most prevalent theme in comments relating to the longer NewsWise programme (including the unit of work) related to children's enjoyment of making their own news reports. Many children's comments emphasised the value of writing news relating to their personal interests and issues that were important to them, whether these were local or global:

"It was fun finding out what was happening in my local area and being able to tell my family."

"My news story is about the COVID-19 situation in India, how they are coping, what they are running short on and how they are going to try and make the situation improve."

"Getting to use quotes that wouldn't usually be heard."

"I loved how we worked together and how people are actually going to read OUR news story!"

Teachers' perspectives on the NewsWise programme

Teachers may be involved in the project through several avenues, for example, by attending an online pre-project teacher training session; their school or class taking part in a NewsWise virtual workshop; running the unit of work with their pupils; taking part in online workshops as part of conferences; taking part in news literacy webinars; downloading online resources or taking part in a news literacy Initial Teacher Training session. Two main surveys were used to capture teachers' feedback on the NewsWise programme itself. The pre-project teacher training survey included questions about the impact of the online training on their knowledge and confidence about supporting news literacy, and their professional perception of the impact of the virtual NewsWise workshop on pupils. Teachers were further invited to complete a post-NewsWise survey, administered several weeks after the teacher training (i.e. after the unit of work) to evaluate any longer-term changes in their teaching practice and on children's news literacy. In addition, a further survey captured feedback from a series of webinars developed following school closures in March 2020, and finally, from an ITT training session in January 2021.

Teacher training was considered high quality and increased confidence in supporting pupils' news literacy in the classroom

Data from the post-teacher training surveys indicate that NewsWise was not only effective in developing the confidence, skills and engagement of pupils but also an insightful and worthwhile experience for the teachers taking part. **9 in 10** teachers (**92.8%**) rated the NewsWise pre-project training as 'excellent' (46.4%) or 'good' (46.4%). Reflecting this, **96.4%** agree their understanding of news literacy has improved and **100%** feel they are now more confident in supporting pupils' news literacy (57.1% 'very confident' and 42.9% 'fairly confident'; see **Figure 14**). In addition, more than 8 in 10 (**85.7%**) say they would recommend the NewsWise training to other schools, while 82.1% say that they would integrate the learning into their future teaching.



Figure 14: Impact of NewsWise pre-project training on teachers

Teachers were also very positive about the quality of the NewsWise pupil workshop, with 88.0% rating it 'excellent' and 12.0% as 'good'. Teachers were also invited to share any observations about the impact of the workshop on pupils. Comments indicated that learning from the workshop had both an immediate and a lasting impact on pupils' news literacy, and that this extended beyond the classroom:

"The whole class have been really enthusiastic about learning about the news in general. They have been able to apply what they have learnt and have told me they have gone home and discussed this with their parents."



"The work on identifying fake news that we did as part of the workshop had a profound effect on the children. Whenever they look at a news article this is the first thing they say. Many went home and talked to their adults about it too. When we began to write they understood the need for fact checking and using reliable sources of information."

"Techniques for challenging authenticity of news reports - develops higher level thinking and critical analysis."

Several teachers noted the benefits of the workshop for supporting all aspects of pupils' literacy:

"...given the circumstances of it having to be virtual, children were very engaged with it and one of the best literacy-based workshops I have been a part of!"

"The NewsWise workshop was great! It was fun and engaging and suited all learners. The pupils developed so many skills in this lesson from ...working collaboratively [to] reading, writing, listening and speaking."

"We are very focused on oracy in school at the moment and this will make up a large part of our SDP [school development plan] next year. The reporting task was great for the children and they enjoyed doing this."



Feedback on the NewsWise unit of work was significantly more limited; however, of 24 teachers that completed a post survey that indicated they had shared some or all of the unit of work with their class, **16** rated it as 'excellent', **7** as 'good' and **1** as 'fairly good'.

Teachers report an increase in pupils' news literacy skills

The post-NewsWise teacher surveys provided more evidence that NewsWise was effective in developing the news literacy skills of pupils:

- **100%** of teachers agree that pupils' skills in thinking critically about news stories have increased
- **100%** of teachers noticed increased confidence when thinking critically about news
- 91.7% say pupils are more likely to use more than one source to check facts
- **91.7%** of teachers agree that participating pupils have a better understanding of aspects of news, such as the difference between fact and opinion



Regarding improvement in specific news literacy skills in their pupils, almost all (95.8%) teachers agree or strongly agree that pupils are able to name some trustworthy and untrustworthy sources of news, and 9 in 10 (91.7%) noticed pupils had increased skills in writing and producing news reports. Teachers also believe that the NewsWise programme has increased pupil engagement with news and journalism, evidenced by 9 in 10 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement (see **Figure 15**).





Following positive comments about the impact of NewsWise on pupils' wider literacy skills and confidence in earlier years of the programme, teachers were again asked about this in Year 3. Surveys indicated that almost 8 in 10 teachers agreed that pupils have increased reading skills (79.2%) and two-thirds noted increased writing confidence (66.7%) (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Teachers' perceptions of the impact of NewsWise on pupils' wider literacy skills and confidence



Teachers were invited to share examples of any pupils who appeared to benefit in particular from taking part in NewsWise. A number of themes arose from a thematic analysis of comments, including improved oracy skills, greater engagement in reading and writing, increased critical awareness and inclusivity. One teacher shared the personal impact of increasing critical literacy skills, such as the confidence to question authority, on one pupil. The teacher observed that this pupil was "very empowered by the fact he could challenge or stand up to power, and that he could speak to someone else if things needed changing". In

particular, the empowering nature of learning about news related to real-world topics with real-world impact (such as Windrush) was mentioned by several teachers:

"The classes were so affected by the Windrush stories that they wanted to know more. I was asked to invite one of our former TAs ...who was caught by the change in legislation, to come into school so that they could interview him. I have **rarely seen children so engaged**. They saw **the power of the media** in changing minds. They realised that they **aren't powerless**, that news organisations can **change governments' minds**."

"As a class, we have discussed the 'fake v real' debate a lot since last Wednesday. Another of my Year 6 girls has revealed that she has been deeply upset by recent 'animal testing' news... so we talked about what she might be able to do to help - another useful NewsWise lesson!"

Increased confidence in public speaking

Many teacher comments shared the impact of the NewsWise workshop on quieter and less confident pupils, for whom the format facilitated and encouraged speaking in front of peers, while others noted that the oracy elements of the project influenced children's writing skills:

"It gave the pupils the opportunity to become news reporters. It made them think about their audience, and how to capture an audience's attention. It was an excellent task to improve their speaking and listening skills as well as their self-esteem and confidence."

"The activity where children had to evaluate the articles against the criteria on the bookmark to decide if the news was fake or not. The opportunity to read the broadcast out at the end. They loved this part and it developed their understanding of the need to use formal direct language."

"Each lesson helped the children to develop their news literacy skills. There was a great deal of talk which was very important for writing."

Greater engagement in reading and writing

The positive impact of reading and writing about real-world, local topics on pupil engagement with literacy and news literacy was mentioned by several teachers:

"Fake News - such a useful skill. Writing a brief report - they surprised themselves with how well and quickly they could put a report together and loved being 'proper reporters'! It gave them real confidence."

"I thought all of the resources were really good. The children got on board with the idea that they were doing actual news and not 'just' another English lesson. It looked at the concepts that we would teach in literacy while being in a real environment."



Engaging reluctant and vulnerable pupils with learning

Another strong theme was that sessions could often be seen to engage lower ability and less engaged students with learning. Furthermore, several teachers noted students who face extra learning challenges found this programme a great way to feel involved in group tasks:

"The lower-middle group showed they could do a piece of writing which was as good as the higher group."

"I think this project was great in supporting my lower attaining children as they were able to access all the learning and really enjoyed the discussion part of the project."

"LL is a child who struggles with writing. He is on the spectrum and can find the school day challenging so it was great to see him involved and eager to volunteer to share his news report that he had completed with his friends."

Increased critical awareness

Both the short and longer-term impact of literacy and critical literacy skills learnt in the programme featured in several teachers' comments:

"Lots of opportunities for purposeful reading (and covert comprehension) throughout the workshop allowed them to explore 'fake' and 'real'. I do think that most of this 'digital generation' assume that anything published must be legitimate, 'real' news - so unless we actively teach them the skills they need to work this out for themselves (made very clear in this workshop), this assumption will remain in place!"

"Fact checking reports to decide if the stories were real or fake as I feel that this gave them immediate transferable skills that they could use outside of the classroom."

"I have always encouraged my pupils to become 'active' readers, but L is now a much more active consumer and questioner of the 'facts' that are being shared on social media. Y5 boy is a bright and enthusiastic lad but his literacy skills are poor - he loved the 'real purpose' of journalistic writing!"

"...thank you all for providing these vital materials / opportunities.... This is content (and knowledge) that we don't normally have access to in Wales and I believe that all Upper Primary children should be able to access. I'm under no illusions, I do not believe that mastering fractions is going to **change my pupils' lives**, but I think that being 'News Literate' just might..."

News literacy and COVID

Finally, a number of teachers noted the timely nature of the project during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"A great project for the children to take part in, particularly after such a difficult year. This has answered lots of unanswered questions for them that they had about the reporting of COVID over the course of the last 18 months."

Support from journalists and student ambassadors

Journalists and student ambassadors help to bring the NewsWise lessons to life for pupils. They help to reinforce the real world context of the whole project by showing pupils how real journalists apply everything the pupils are learning about. Pupils are able to have their questions answered by a journalism expert and receive feedback on their reports from a real journalist. Establishing a journalist/student ambassador element was a significant development of the programme in year three.

In the last year, **25** journalists have taken part in a total of 32 interactions with pupils. 1,074 pupils had at least one interaction with a journalist. Journalists are varied in terms of their professional specialism, as well as being diverse in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and background. Journalist volunteers are mostly recruited via established relationships with the National Union of Journalists and the Sports Journalist Association. Student ambassadors are recruited through various channels and come from various universities across the UK.

The ambassador programme was piloted in 2020/21. The implementation of the programme was delayed and disrupted due to school closures and ongoing educational disruption relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, 14 ambassadors took part in interactions with 450 pupils. Although there were limited comments on the impact of visits from journalists and support from ambassadors, these tended to be extremely positive:

"Having our ambassador and our 'real' journalist interact directly with the pupils was an amazing opportunity for them - and me!"

"Luisa was able to give children an insight into journalism. She gave them tips when writing the reports and feedback on finished reports. She was cheerful and smiley and the children liked her."

"We loved speaking to Teresa - the children were buzzing about being able to speak to a 'real life journalist'. Teresa answered our questions with clarity and humour - it was a really enjoyable session."

"She was fabulous [but] we weren't able to use her as I wanted to because COVID kept on causing chaos here at school."

Student ambassador surveys

As mentioned in the teacher comment above, it was difficult for student ambassadors to support schools to the extent that had been hoped for before the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting this, just 2 surveys were received from volunteers in this role. However, both rated their online training 'excellent' and said they felt 'very supported' while volunteering.

Both rated their experience of supporting pupils as part of the NewsWise programme as 'good', and commented:

"I really enjoyed volunteering and passing my knowledge on to the pupils. Equally, I enjoyed hearing the intelligent views and questions from pupils, and was really impressed with their news reports at the end. Overall I would rate it as a good experience, purely because we did have to wait around quite a lot to have any sessions, due to COVID-19. But apart from that setback it was really enjoyable and I got a lot out of it."

"I think it has made me more aware of my role as a journalist in society, and it has been a very positive and eye-opening experience."

Relatedly, many pupils named this as a favourite part of the project:

"Talking to actual journalists was fun."

"Our student ambassador is very good as she tells us useful information to do with reporting a news story and how to get the truth out of someone when you are interviewing."

"...they were kind and taught us a lot about news and when we had a question they would listen to us and take us seriously and they were fun."

Teacher 3-month interviews

In addition to the surveys detailed above, a number of teachers were contacted by phone approximately three months after their initial involvement with NewsWise to take part in semi-structured interviews designed to evaluate any longer-term outcomes in participating pupils. The following case studies present a detailed description of the programme and some unintended, but welcome, outcomes in some pupils including greater civic engagement and increased confidence to question and analyse sources, and reflect on one's own knowledge:

"Most of them want to something to do with civic involvement"

We took part in NewsWise in October (2020), around the time of the US presidential elections. When we heard about it, we thought, "That looks great!" and given the timing, thought it could be a real-world way to help the children understand fake news and so on.

One of the most interesting and valuable parts of the project for the children was the video call with a journalist. It was great to have **a real purpose** to build towards when we started thinking and talking about journalism. It got them really thinking about purposes of writing, but also what they can be when they're older, because you can't be what you don't know! We were able to go and look at the journalist's articles, in fact the paper we were sent had one of his articles (about footballers with dementia, heading the ball and so on) as a lead - it was amazing that it worked out like that! We also had a student ambassador available to support us, although that has been tricky given the challenges of this year. However, we're trying to **set up a school newspaper** and hoping ambassadors will act as proofreaders and editors of the children's work later on. In terms of the shorter-term impacts I noticed, definitely I'd say they have a better understanding of the structure of news stories, how they use quotes and what makes reliable news. Longer term, I'd say awareness of the news has been something that has changed in the class as a whole. In the Zoom conversations I had with children, probably over half of them mentioned the inauguration being in the news. I think they're certainly **more engaged**.

Another interesting thing I noticed was when we got a real copy of The Guardian to share with the children (after checking it didn't have anything inappropriate and parents were happy). I think before that they saw this type of news as an adult thing, but actually having their own paper, being able to take it home – that gave them a sense of ownership of the news and an understanding they can read it, so it's not only 'children's news' that's for them. Even in terms of exposure to vocabulary, I think a good quality newspaper offers a great opportunity.

Finally, thinking about ideas for the school newspaper that we've started to develop, when we asked who would like to write something, about 10 children came back and interestingly, most of them want to write something to do with **civic involvement**, for example, the impact of COVID-19 on local shops, or things to do with plastics in the sea. I thought it was a really great programme, I've even recommended it to other people.

Deputy Headteacher, Devon

"They've started to be more inquisitive"

"We took part in NewsWise around November 2020, starting from the reference point that we all get a lot of exposure to the news, whether that's through newspapers or online. Our two Year 5 classes had the NewsWise virtual workshop, and it was great that the team could be flexible about when those took place, to work around the times we live in (self-isolation and so on!) In terms of the workshops taking place on screen, I think because the children are used to seeing the news on screen, it kind of matched that idea, as did the video calls from the journalist – they are used to seeing reporters on TV talking like that, so I think that worked well. The children were also supported by having class teachers alongside, reiterating or adapting some of the information shared to suit the differentiation in each class group.

Not all the children were interested in news or newspapers when I introduced the project, but as I started bringing articles in every day and getting them to reflect on them and share things that interested them with a partner, they became more excited about it. Then, what started to come through more were the questions, the **critical side** – asking 'How can this be true?' or 'Where did they find this out?' So a lot more trying to understand the background of a story rather than just taking it at face value. It's also developing their understanding of why they make the choices they do within their **writing**.

The journalist we had was really good. He'd written a lot of sports articles and we did a lot of preparation based on that, brainstorming questions and so on. I think that was a really useful thing for the children, because even though I can tell them about how these roles work, hearing it from someone directly involved makes more of an impact with them. Our student ambassador was also great, she was really honest and asked very good questions

with the children about the choices they'd made with their writing, which helped them to stretch themselves and think more deeply about how they'd constructed a piece of writing, rather than just throwing something together.

Thinking about longer-term impacts, it is hard to say as the timing of the session was just before Christmas and as soon as we were back we went into lockdown again! Remote learning makes it harder to assess children's comprehension, but I do see them being more able to look for things in a text, to challenge things they might find, or even asking themselves **'How do I know this?'** They've started to be more inquisitive. Most recently, we've been able to refer back to the skills around analysing news articles that were part of NewsWise on Safer Internet Day, linking to the idea of keeping safe online, and what information you need to look for. And we do refer back to some of the ideas that we started from in the NewsWise project, for example, when looking for key events in other texts. As part of teaching, you're always establishing links with things they've done previously to build experience and a pool of knowledge."

Teacher, Coventry

Another teacher commented on the benefit of the programme on the practice of teaching news literacy in school, highlighting how the programme supported them to teach bias to children:

"Bias is, it's always been in the curriculum, it's always been something that's quite difficult to teach, especially because they are so young. And I think NewsWise has made that a lot easier to teach. I think that's something I'll use again."

Teacher, Ayrshire

Family pack feedback

The family element of the NewsWise programme was developed considerably in Year 2, with a series of family workshops delivered across the UK. However, it was not possible to run these in Year 3 due to the difficulties posed by the various lockdowns and social distancing regulations. As part of adaptations to COVID-19, the NewsWise team therefore designed a 'Family Pack' of downloadable resources to help parents support children's news literacy at a crucial time.

The resources included a very short, optional survey accessed through a QR code to capture any feedback. These family resources were downloaded 1,430 times, and 13 survey responses were received between 1 August 2020 and 31 July 2021. 10 rated the activities 'Very good', 2 'good' and 1 'OK'. Positive comments included "Very useful for kids and pre-teens."

Webinar surveys

114 feedback forms were received from teachers taking part in webinars in Year 3. Webinars were designed to offer complete news literacy CPD for primary teachers, with four complementary sessions covering critical analysis of news, talking about the news and



supporting pupils' wellbeing, and the impact of reading and writing real news in the classroom, with strategies for introducing all of this into teaching practice.

100% of participants rated the webinar as 'excellent' (78.1%) or 'good' (21.9%). Almost all (**95.6%**) said it had contributed to their professional development either 'very much' (42.1%) or 'quite a lot' (53.5%). Comments included:

"Good introduction to the importance of critical literacy, how fake news is prevalent, the forms it takes and why we need to address it. Practical examples which can be used in the classroom."

"Very informative, but also succinct. It was refreshing to have a course focused on things that have worked for others and specific ideas, rather than theory."

"I cannot praise these webinars highly enough. They are just so full of really useful information and resources."

Initial teacher training feedback

Alongside designing news literacy training sessions that can contribute to qualified teachers' CPD (Continuing Professional Development), the NewsWise team has developed training designed to support teachers as part of their Initial Teacher Training. In January 2021, 78 third-year undergraduate teacher trainees at Stranmillis College University in Belfast took part in a one-day virtual news literacy ITT session. This included information on transforming primary classrooms into newsrooms and a practical 'teachers as writers' activity, producing a news report on a current story in real time.

52 feedback forms were received. 31 respondents (59.6%) rated the training day as 'excellent', 17 (32.7%) 'good' and 4 (7.7%) 'average'. More than 9 in 10 respondents agreed that, after the training, they felt confident to deliver news teaching in an exciting way, had a better understanding of news literacy and intended to integrate the learning into their future teaching practice (see **Figure 17**).

Figure 17: Feedback from ITT on news literacy training



Most comments were extremely positive, including those from a lecturer's perspective, with the only negative points relating to the length of the day.



"Very well planned, engaging and effective, loved it"

"The format of the day worked really well between a mixture of self-directed and led work. I loved the little games interspersed with real and fake news to keep everyone engaged, yet with a very valuable learning message. We have had students email us to say how much they enjoyed the day."

"To be honest, I wasn't really looking forward to the day & was very pleasantly surprised. I can't wait to teach more about the news/news writing in my placement class this year hopefully!"

Conclusion

The third year of NewsWise covers a period of exceptional educational disruption. Many pupils are estimated to have lost up to six months of schooling since the first lockdown²⁰, and studies show that children in areas of disadvantage suffered in particular from unequal access to resources and support²¹, and that their educational outcomes have been poorer as a result²². Indeed, the NewsWise team has provided a week-long learning sequence for summer schools to support education recovery in response to Department for Education recommendations²³. At the same time, UK surveys found that some children and young people began to disengage with the news over the course of the pandemic. For example, a recent Ofcom report stated that, following a peak in interest at the start of the pandemic: *"…in 2021 nearly all the participants had reverted to being disengaged with TV and radio news. In most cases the news the children heard was consumed passively; sometimes from a parent but more often via social media... Moreover, most of the children in the study did not appear to question whether what they saw via these feeds was true or accurate, and when asked, some struggled to reflect on how they would do this."²⁴*

Such findings emphasise the urgency and importance of supporting children and young people's news literacy. This has been recognised in both the UK Government's Media Literacy Strategy²⁵ and by international organisations such as UNESCO, who advocate for, "funding and support for Media and Information Literacy focused on combating the disinfodemic, especially through educational interventions targeting children, young people and older citizens."²⁶ It has never been more essential to help children develop the news literacy attitudes, behaviours, confidence and skills that allow them to engage effectively with the news, and to evaluate the reliability of news sources.

Returning to findings from this year's evaluation, we can see that the NewsWise programme was, remarkably, able to sustain or even exceed outcomes from previous years, despite delivery having to be virtual. Data from the third year of the programme show that, across a

²⁰ Sibieta, 2021

²¹ See e.g. <u>https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/covid-19-and-literacy/covid-19-and-literacy-educational-inequality-and-learning-loss/</u>

²² Newton, 2021

²³ <u>https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/newswise-learning-sequence/</u>

²⁴ Ofcom, 2021

²⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2021

²⁶ Posetti and Bontcheva, 2020

variety of indicators, pupils' news literacy attitudes, behaviour, confidence and skills improved after taking part in the NewsWise workshop, and that this improvement is sustained following completion of the unit of work. This is evidenced by more than double the number of pupils being able to identify real and fake news stories correctly at the end of the programme. These findings suggest that the workshop is an effective tool to improve children's news literacy, and that the unit of work consolidates learning.

It is particularly heartening to see that the number of pupils interested in news, and developing more positive news literacy behaviours such as checking sources, more than doubled following participation in the NewsWise workshop, and to learn about the variety of positive outcomes on so many areas of learning, including the empowering nature of learning about the role of news in calling power to account, confidence in public speaking, stronger writing skills and inclusivity from teacher surveys. Similarly, it is possible to see signs of longer-term impact, increased curiosity and interest in civic engagement noted in teacher interviews.

In addition, teachers and trainee teachers themselves report increased understanding of news literacy and confidence in teaching news literacy in the classroom, suggesting involvement in the programme may have a longer-term, sustainable impact on those they teach in years to come. Indeed, teachers have been identified as a key target group in the action plan linked to the aforementioned Online Media Literacy Strategy. Schools, families and media organisations each have a role to play in fostering the skills and confidence that will empower children and young people to become responsible news creators and consumers. NewsWise workshops will begin again in September, in person wherever possible with the virtual option available if not, allowing them to reach even more children in areas of disadvantage with this vital programme.



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Our sincere thanks to all of the schools who, despite really challenging times, participated in our surveys this year. We couldn't do it without you!

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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.

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