

“Digitally native or digitally naïve?”

Rethinking digital literacy in schools

Adam Steedman Thake

April 2026

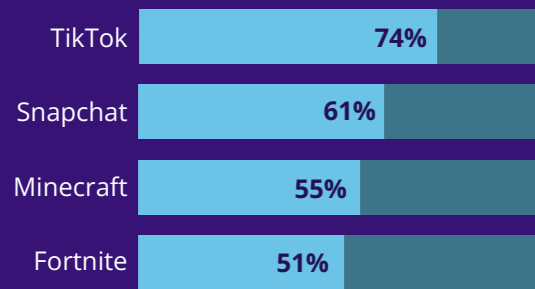


Visual overview

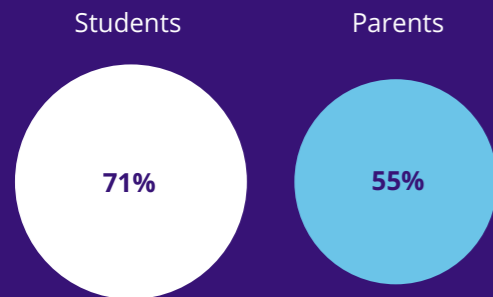
The UK's digital skills crisis will continue unless students are given the tools and techniques they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Young people are very online.

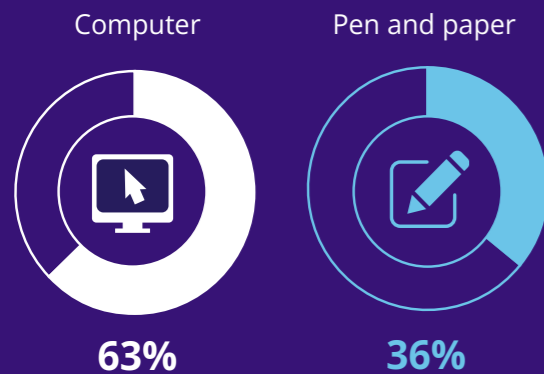
Percentage of 11-18 year-olds who feel confident using:



I am an early adopter of technology:



Percentage of students who are comfortable using this medium for more than an hour:

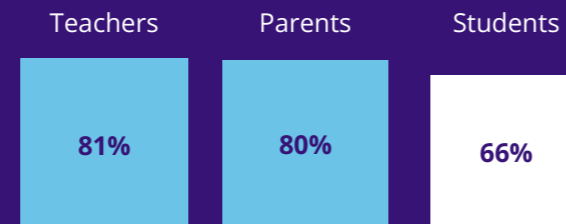


But that doesn't mean they are digitally skilled.

Percentage of 11-18 year-olds who have shared their personal information with people they don't know online:

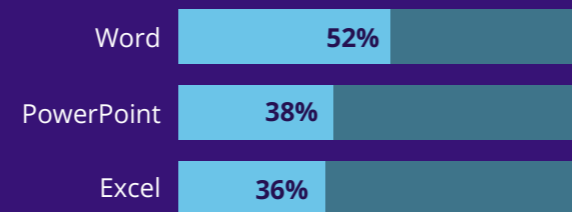


I am confident spotting disinformation:



And they are less confident with workplace tools.

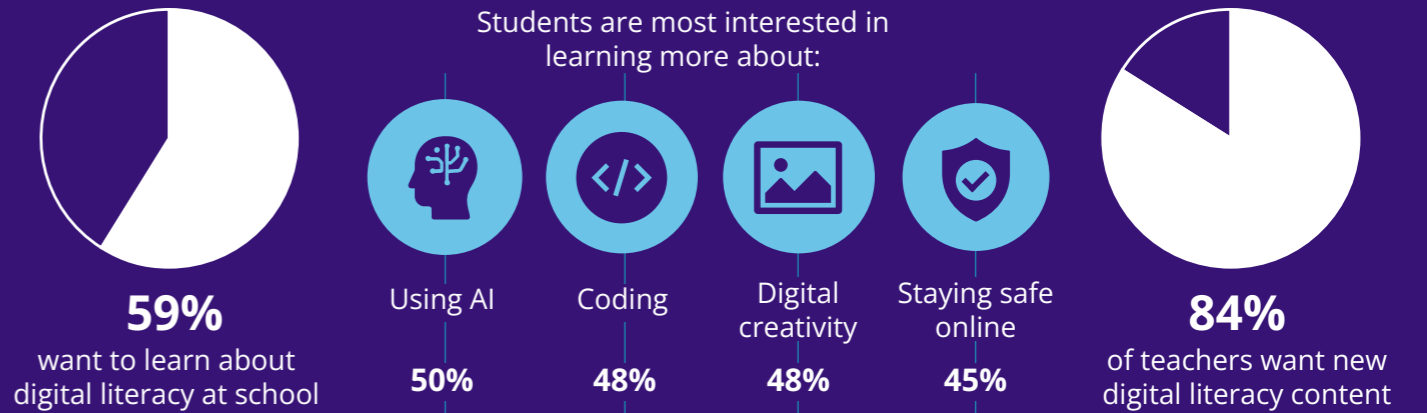
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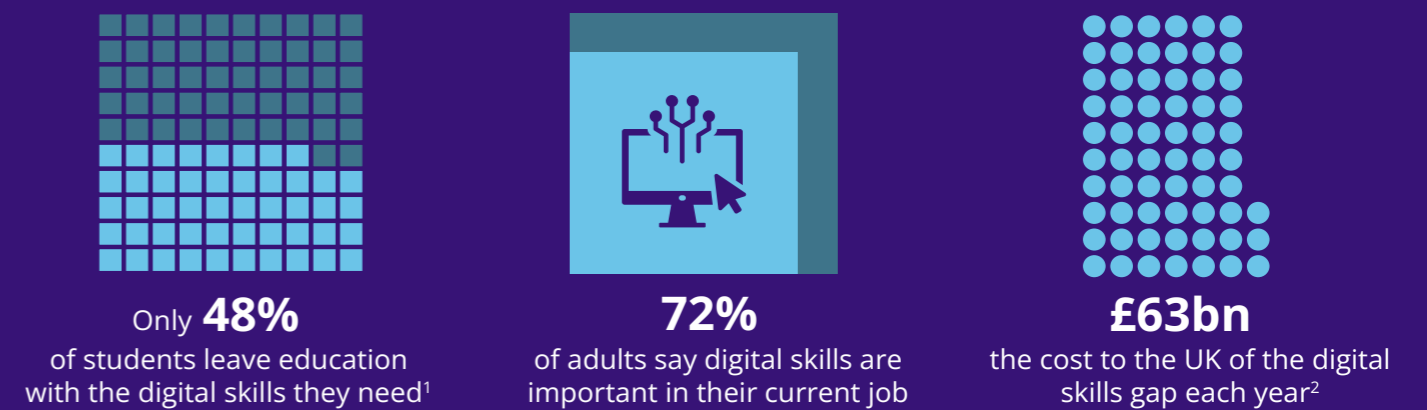
“ [I'm] very confident [on social media], but when it comes to different apps, such as... Word or Excel, it's got a bit hard. ”

Student in Year 10-11 focus group

Students want to close this digital skills gap.

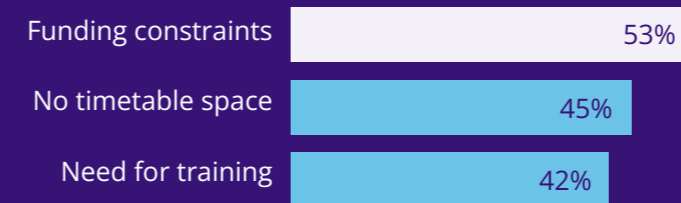


Closing the skills gap is vital for the country too.



There are many barriers to teaching students digital skills.

Main challenges according to teachers:



Students are able to access inappropriate content.

“ Everyone in our class had... 2 or 3 apps that they weren't old enough for... like SnapChat, TikTok. ”
Student in Year 7-9 Focus Group

Although technology is often available in schools, it is not always used.

“ We don't really use laptops in my school, we just kind of, like, write on paper. ”
Young person aged 17-18

Recommendations

1. Embed digital literacy across the curriculum

Digital literacy should be taught across subjects, not just in Computing.

2. Develop a coherent, system-wide digital literacy framework

AQA will develop a framework to create consistency without rigidity.

3. Strengthen teacher training and resources

Equip teachers to deliver digital literacy confidently.

4. AQA will support systemwide change

We'll help schools and colleges to embed digital literacy across subjects, including in the shift to on-screen digital assessments.

We look forward to working with schools and the Government to make this a reality.

Sources : 1. Royal Society, System upgrade required, 2025, p4; 2. House of Commons Library, Digital skills statistics, 12th April 2024

About the author

Adam Steedman Thake is the Policy and Evidence Manager at AQA, where he leads the development of evidence-based policy. He has a decade of experience working in education and began his career as a primary school teacher in Tottenham. He then moved into the Civil Service and worked in policy and strategy roles across the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice. Adam has an MSc in Social Research from Birkbeck College, University of London and an MA in History from the University of Manchester.

About AQA

AQA is an independent education charity with more than 120 years of expertise and knowledge; we are experts in assessments and qualifications.

AQA designs, creates, and delivers rigorous and fair assessments to more than one million students every year, making us the most chosen general qualifications awarding body in England. We provide high quality assessments that are fair and reliable which is why they are valued by students, universities, and employers around the world.

We are more than an exam board. AQA's purpose is to improve education and assessment outcomes for teachers and learners. We achieve that aim by using our world-class research and expertise to help every teacher and learner we work with, wherever they are. We fund cutting edge development of assessment products and teacher support to help learners realise their potential. We also share our knowledge and insight to inform policy by engaging with teachers, students, parents, politicians, policymakers and thought leaders. One of the ways we do this is by publishing policy reports, like this one.

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Executive Summary

Modern life is increasingly digital and online.

Many young people live their lives online, finding information, building relationships, and exploring all that the digital world has to offer.

But knowing what buttons to press is only part of the picture. Young people need to understand how to make the most of emerging digital technologies while staying safe and protecting themselves.



This combination of skills and knowledge is commonly referred to as digital literacy.

Digital literacy needs to be considered in a broad sense, with a focus on ensuring that young people are equipped to use technology effectively and safely.

About this report

This report assesses the state of digital literacy among young people in England and examines how the education system can better prepare them for an increasingly digital society. Drawing on polling and focus groups with students, teachers, parents and the public, we found a nuanced and complex picture of young people's attitudes towards digital technology.

The report considers a variety of methods for improving young people's digital literacy.

Our recommendations

1 Embedding digital literacy across the curriculum

This should be taught within Computing and reinforced through other subjects wherever evaluation, online safety or digital skills naturally arise, with streamlined content to create timetable space.

2 Developing a coherent, systemwide digital literacy framework

This would set out core knowledge, skills and progression across key stages, supported by exemplars and benchmarks.

3 Supporting schools to deliver confidently

This would be achieved by strengthening teacher training and providing high-quality, subject-specific resources.

4 Identifying clear opportunities to explore digital literacy across subjects

AQA will use our assessment expertise to develop practical, scalable models for delivering digital literacy in schools and colleges.



59% of students want to learn about digital literacy at school.

Our findings

Our research shows that although young people use digital platforms extensively, many lack the confidence and skills needed to evaluate information, manage risks and use workplace technologies.

Our findings indicate:

- There is a demand from young people for more digital literacy education.
- Many young people have received little or no teaching on how to evaluate online information.
- Teachers want to teach digital literacy, but some feel under-prepared to teach a changing and complex area.
- Students have low confidence in identifying misinformation, recognising bias and managing online risks.
- Young people lack exposure to common workplace software.

A change of approach is clearly needed.



What needs to change

The report goes on to identify practical routes for change. These include embedding digital literacy across subjects, strengthening teacher support and training and improving post-16 pathways and qualifications.

The recommendations propose a coherent, systemwide approach to improving digital literacy and ensuring fair access to high quality digital learning.

Young people's relationships with technology are complex, and we need to avoid making simplistic assumptions about young people naturally being 'digital natives.'

As one teacher put it to us:

“ Sadly, a lot of the kids, though, are very digitally naïve... the way that they share information... really shows a naïvety about what the risks and the downsides of being so digitally aware are. ”

Science Teacher with Year 13 form group

These findings reinforce a consistent theme. Young people are active digital users, but their confidence, safety and critical understanding are uneven.



30% of young people say they always or often share online information without checking that it's true.

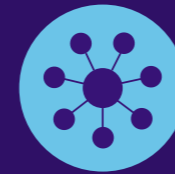
The system is not yet providing the structured digital literacy education that young people themselves say they need. Digital literacy has become a fundamental competency for young people, sitting alongside reading, writing and numeracy. It now needs consistent, system-level attention.

Government action

The Curriculum and Assessment Review has a clear focus on the core digital literacy knowledge and skills. The Government's [Media Literacy Action Plan \(2026-2029\)](#) also commits to improving the nation's digital and media skills. With curriculum and assessment reform already underway, now is the right time to strengthen digital literacy across subjects, modernise Computing, and support the introduction of on-screen assessment.

AQA stands ready to support policymakers, schools, colleges and the wider education sector by advising on content, designing robust assessments and helping to shape practical models for implementation.

Recommendations



Embed digital literacy across the curriculum

Digital literacy should be taught within Computing and reinforced across other subjects wherever evaluation, online safety or digital skills naturally arise. Evidence from students, teachers and international systems shows that Computing alone cannot meet the needs of all learners, especially beyond Key Stage 3. As students move through their education, we need to ensure that digital literacy isn't optional. If we agree that digital literacy is important enough that everyone should develop it, it needs to be cross-curricular. Embedding digital literacy across subjects ensures all students encounter these capabilities throughout their education, not only those taking specialist or digitally rich courses.



Develop a coherent, systemwide digital literacy framework

A national framework should define core knowledge, skills and progression from early years to post-16, developed in collaboration with sector experts. Teachers reported uncertainty about what digital literacy includes and how it develops across key stages. International models demonstrate that clear expectations, exemplars and benchmarks help schools plan coherently while still allowing subject departments to tailor delivery. AQA will develop an overarching framework, to provide consistency across the system without imposing a rigid, one-size-fits-all model.



Strengthen teacher training and provide high-quality resources

Teachers need support to deliver digital literacy confidently. Many told us they feel under-prepared, and the pace of technological change outstrips current training. Strengthened Continuing Professional Development, alongside high-quality, plug-and-play resources that work for non-specialists, will help teachers build both their own and their students' digital capability.



AQA's role in supporting systemwide change

AQA will help schools and colleges embed digital literacy, drawing on our assessment and subject expertise to develop practical, scalable models. This includes identifying opportunities across subjects, supporting high-quality exemplar resources, and advising on assessment design, including the shift to on-screen digital assessments.

What is digital literacy?

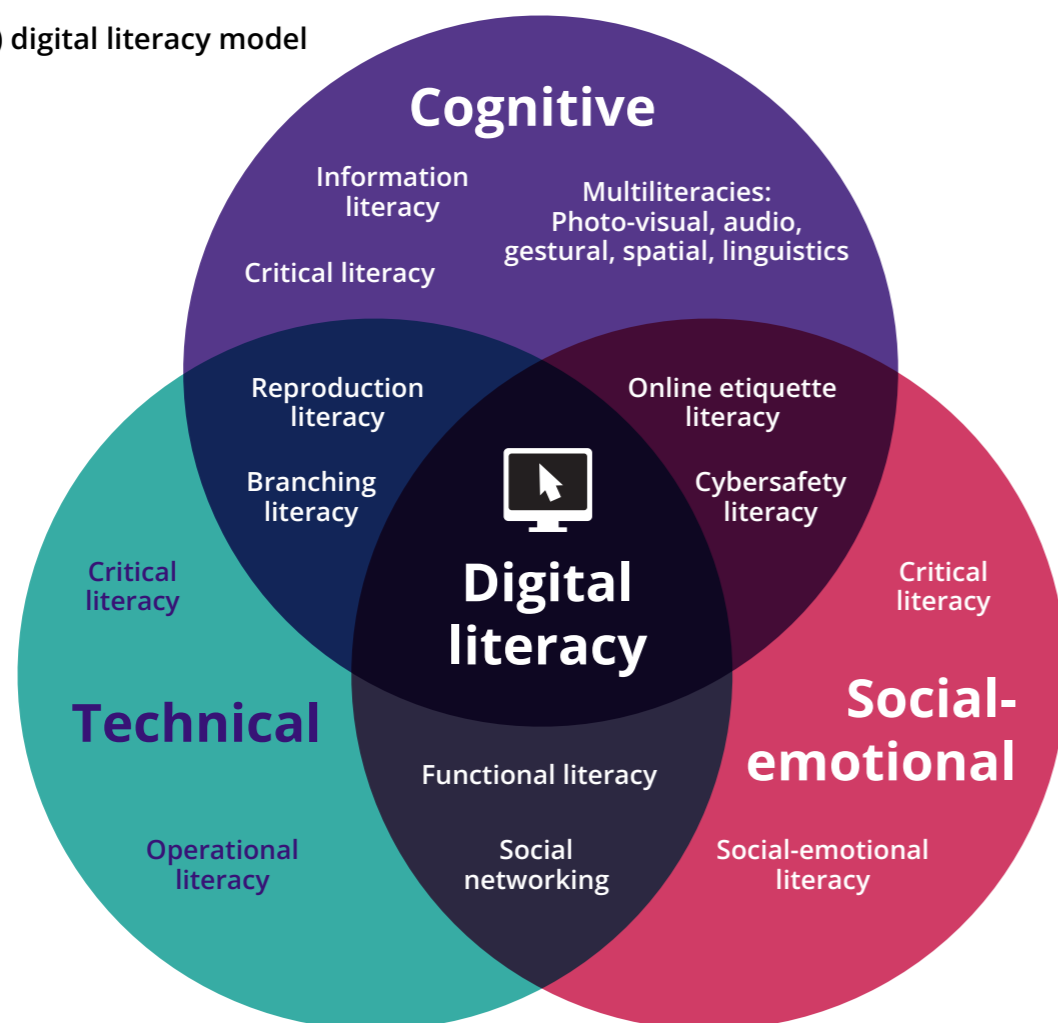
The term 'digital literacy' originates from Paul Gilster's 1997 book of the same name, where it was initially defined as 'the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers.' However, as the role of technology has expanded in the intervening decades, so too has the [understanding of the term](#). While we can all agree that 'improving digital literacy' is important, there needs to be a level of precision in what we are calling for. The

analysis below draws on the work of AQA researcher Jonathon Dean.

Academic definitions

In academia, there has been strong debate about the precise nature of what digital literacy includes. Coldwell-Neilson (2020)³ has defined digital literacy as 'the ability to identify and use technology confidently, creatively and critically to effectively meet the demands and challenges of living, learning and working in a digital society'

Ng's (2012) digital literacy model



and developed a framework of its essential elements.

Wan Ng (2012)⁴ refers to 'the multiplicity of literacies associated with the use of digital technologies' when creating a framework of three overlapping dimensions: Technical, Cognitive and Social-emotional. These three dimensions overlap; for instance, cyber safety literacy exists in the overlap between the Cognitive and Social-emotional dimensions, and branching literacy exists in the overlap between Technical and Cognitive dimensions.

Digital literacy is not a concept that is easy to define, nor is there a universally accepted definition of what it includes. Digital literacy should be understood as a suite of overlapping skills, knowledges and behaviours which are required to use digital technologies effectively, safely, and appropriately. However exactly which combination of elements can vary according to the context of different curriculum subjects. There is substantial overlap between definitions, as explored in Annex A.

What teachers say

In focus groups with teachers, there was a mixed response in defining what digital literacy should look like in schools and what it should focus on and teachers interpreted the term 'digital literacy' differently. This mirrors the complex landscape. However, by the end of the discussion there was more clarity that the main priorities of digital literacy in schools should be:

- how to recognise deep fakes
- spotting misinformation
- prompt engineering
- video and image creation
- cyber security
- online safety
- encourage curiosity by demonstrating how rapid technological developments mean that the discipline is ever evolving and requires regular engagement
- the applicability of digital literacy to other school disciplines.

The following quote was emblematic of the discussion:

“Showing them how you could use your digital literacy in English, but then also in Geography, in History, in Science, you know, noticing that the skills that you might have learned through using different technologies can be applied in different subjects in different ways.”

Teacher

What the Curriculum and Assessment Review says

The Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) has defined digital literacy as encompassing:

“the knowledge, behaviours and confidence required to use technologies and computer systems creatively, safely and effectively. It also involves the ability to make well-informed critical judgements about the implications, risks and impact of how digital technology is used.”

This is a useful definition which we will be using in this report. Digital literacy is a core suite of knowledge and skills which are important now and in future. Digital literacy should be considered as important as numeracy and literacy and taken as seriously throughout school and college. While not everyone needs to know how to unpick reams of complex coding, digital literacy is needed to ensure students can thrive in an increasingly digitised society.

3. Coldwell-Neilson, J. (2020). Unlocking the Code to Digital Literacy – Final Report 2020. Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment. https://tr.edu.au/resources/FS16-0269_Coldwell-Neilson_Report_2020.pdf

4. Ng, W. (2012). 'Can We Teach Digital Natives Digital Literacy?' Computers & Education. 59(3), 1065-1078. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.04.016>

A digital landscape and why this matters now

In an increasingly digital age, young people need the skills, knowledge and confidence to harness the benefits of digital technology and stay safe while doing so.

When today's young people leave the school or college gates, they will walk into a digital world. Work is increasingly underpinned by technology in a variety of different sectors. Relationships are increasingly formed and maintained through digital forums. Often the information we search for is done at the click of a button.

The idea of the "digitally native" student is more complex than it first appears. Young people often use social media extensively, yet many have limited opportunities to develop skills such as evaluating information, staying safe in digital environments or using many of the common workplace programs that underpin modern employment. Strengthening this competence can support safer online experiences, improved employability and more confident democratic participation.

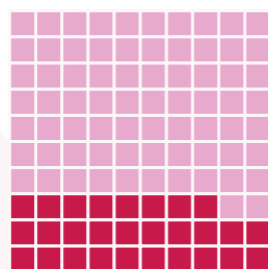
The risks of inaction

Digital skills are already essential across the labour market, yet around 7.3 million employed adults lack fundamental digital literacy, and basic digital capability is projected to become [the UK's largest skills gap by 2030](#).



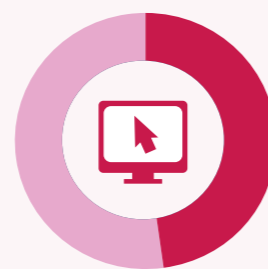
7.3 million people in the UK lack the minimum essential digital skills for work

Technological change is [accelerating disruption](#), increasing demand for digital and STEM skills in a wide range of occupations, and leaving those without digital confidence further behind. AI-generated content is becoming more widespread, with low public confidence in [judging its accuracy](#), and the UK's digital skills gap is estimated to cost [£63 billion per year](#).



Only 28% of the public feel confident in their ability to use AI tools in daily life.

With only around [half of students](#) leaving education with the digital skills they need, there is a need for urgent action. The evidence shows that digital literacy is now a foundational skill, comparable to reading, writing and numeracy in its importance. It therefore deserves deliberate and consistent focus.



Only 48% of students leave full-time education with the digital skills they need.

Why now?

Now is a critical moment for exploring fundamental changes to the education we provide for young people in England. With the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review and the Government's

response, as well as Ofqual consulting on the regulation of on-screen assessments, the starting pistol for changes to the education system has been fired. This is an opportunity to reshape how digital literacy is taught and ensure young people are prepared for the labour market they will enter.

The [Government's response](#) broadly agreed with the Curriculum and Assessment Review on digital literacy, stating:

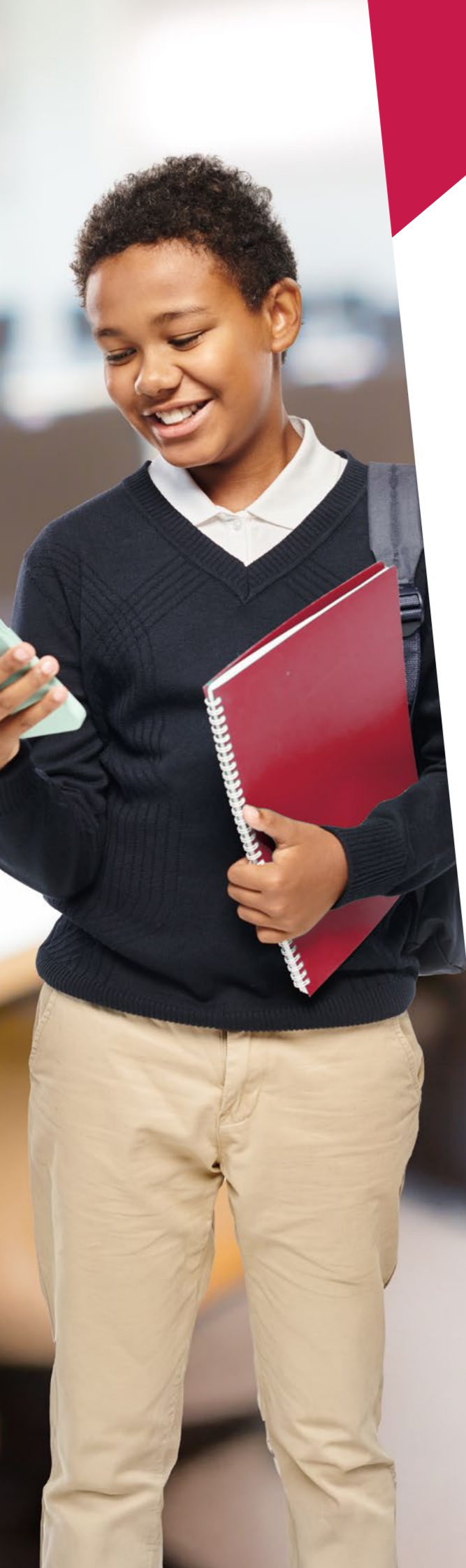
"We'll teach our young people to think critically and act thoughtfully, armed with the digital, financial and media literacy they need to thrive in the modern world..."

"We will ensure that vital applied knowledge and skills in financial, media and digital literacy are embedded into the revised curriculum..."

The Government's response also states:

"We agree with the Review that the computing curriculum should be the main vehicle for teaching about digital literacy, and we are confident that delivering the computing recommendations will provide more pupils with valuable digital skills that are essential for the future. It is also clear that, in some subjects, digital methods now influence the content and how it is taught. We will work with experts to assess the validity of digital practice in these subjects, the evidence of whether this can be done robustly and whether it merits inclusion in the new curriculum. Where it does, we will include a requirement for the relevant digital content in those subjects' programmes of study and we will ensure that it aligns with the computing curriculum, to reduce the risk of duplication."





Computing curriculum and beyond

While a revised Computing curriculum is a natural and necessary component of delivering high-quality digital literacy to young people, we need to go further. Early study of Computing in primary school is important to give young children a solid foundation. But once they move into secondary school, and further into Key Stage 4, students still need high-quality digital literacy education.

While more technical components may be included in a core Computing or Technology curriculum, many elements comprising Digital Literacy can be embedded across subjects. We should explore opportunities for embedding digital literacy across subjects.

Our digital literacy survey

To find out more about the digital literacy of young people, we spent several weeks speaking to young people, parents and teachers about what they thought. We polled 1,000 11-18-year-olds, 1,000 parents of 11-18-year-olds, and 1,000 secondary school teachers, as well as 2,000 members of the British public.³

We also conducted focus groups with 13 young people and 14 teachers, to understand more about what they thought.⁴ What we found showed a nuanced and complex picture of young people's attitudes towards digital technology, and how to improve their digital literacy. We heard that:

1. Young people want more digital literacy education.

Young people told us that Numeracy and Financial Skills (65%), Digital Literacy (59%) and Online Safety (53%) are the areas they want to learn more about.

2. There is strong concern about misinformation but limited teaching.



Nine in ten students (87%) want to learn more about spotting online misinformation.

Young people say that they lack confidence at reading news or identifying disinformation. Many (30%) say they often share content without checking its accuracy and only 21% of young people say they always read beyond the headline. Worryingly, 34% of young people report having shared personal information online with strangers; this may well be an underestimate of the true scale.

3. Students use social media extensively but have less experience with workplace tools.

While 79% of young people use TikTok and 67% use Snapchat, far fewer report using

applications such as PowerPoint (47%), Excel (46%) or Word (59%).

Young people and technology

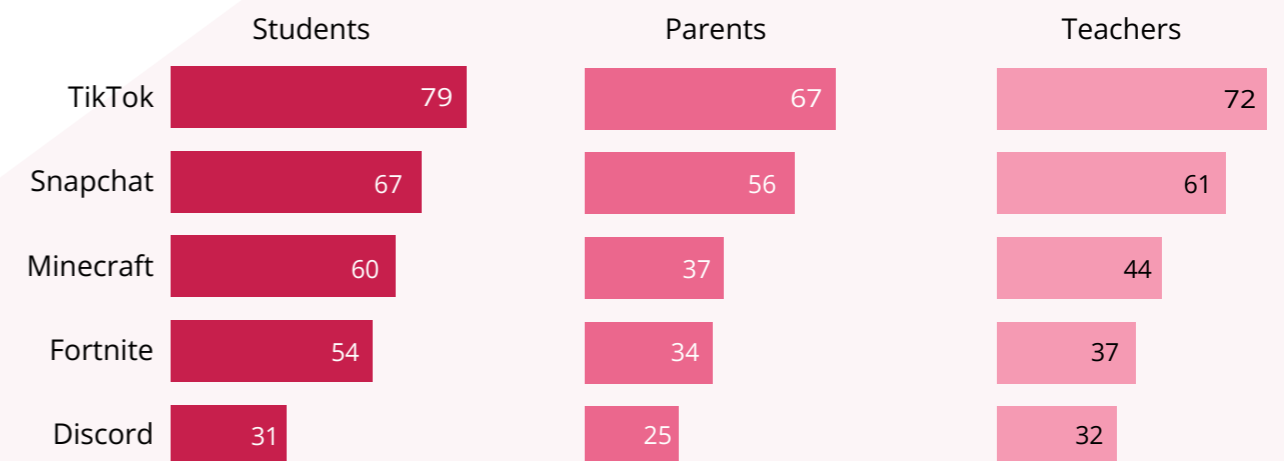
Young people told us they felt confident using social media and recreational digital tools, such as gaming, but were much less confident with workplace tools.

When we asked about what programs they have used before, young people were much more likely to report using social media or gaming programs and less likely to report using workplace tools. While this is to be expected, it clearly demonstrates a gap

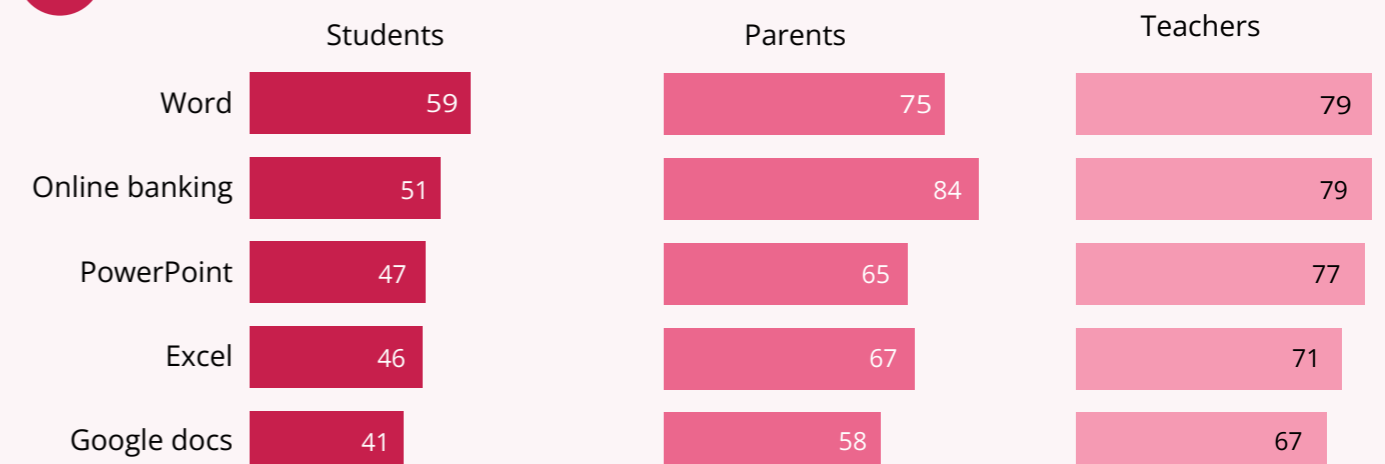
Question: Have you used any of the following programs before? (%)



Social media / gaming

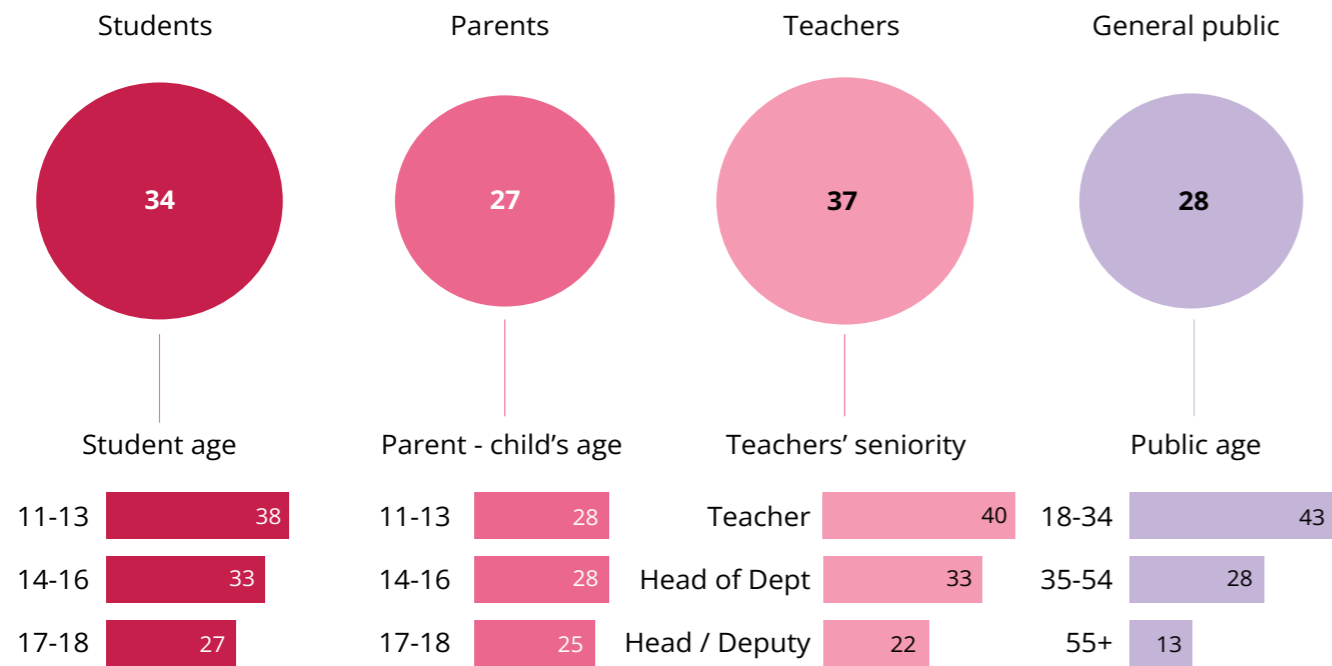


Workplace / business tools



³ Polling and focus groups were undertaken by Savanta, who surveyed 2042 members of the General Population, 1024 students aged 11-18, 1175 parents of 11-18-year-olds, and 1015 teachers of 11-18-year-olds. Savanta also undertook 3 focus groups with young people aged 11-18, and 2 focus groups with teachers of 11-18-year-olds. Data was weighted to be representative of England by age, gender, region, and social grade. Interviews were conducted online. ⁴ Three focus groups were conducted with young people, organised by age group. The Years 7 to 9 group comprised four participants, the Years 10 and 11 group comprised five participants, and the Years 12 and 13 group comprised four participants. In addition, two focus groups were undertaken with teachers, each involving seven participants.

Question: Have you ever shared personal information (e.g. full name, school, location) with someone you didn't know online? (%)



in current exposure to digital tools and applications among young people.

Our findings show that the use of AI tools (like ChatGPT) is growing at pace, Ofcom's survey found that around **three in ten** (31%) adults now claim to have used AI tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini, compared to less than a quarter (23%) in 2023. Our survey found that over half (59%) of the general population had used ChatGPT. The shift from ICT to Computing to boost coding skills, during the last curriculum reform was well intended, but the idea that 'digital natives' would innately be good typists or spreadsheet users has not come to fruition.

“ (I'm) very confident [on social media], but... when it comes to different apps, such as... Word or Excel, it's got a bit hard. ”

Student in Year 10-11 focus group

“ When I go to work and I have to do Excel spreadsheets... it gets a bit complicated. ”

Student in Year 12-13 focus group

In focus groups, young people also reported feeling confident users of social media but less confident in other programs.

Teachers and Senior Leaders we spoke to were also concerned that young people's confidence using social media can mask deeper issues.

“Some learners can navigate social media yet still do not know how to copy and paste. There are also gaps in critical thinking and checking the reliability of information remain weak spots.” – Senior Leader

Online risks and hazards

Over a third of young people (34%) reported sharing personal information online with people they did not know. More worryingly, the younger the student was, the more likely they were to have shared personal information online with 38% of 11–13-year-olds reporting having shared personal information online, compared to 27% of 17–18-year-olds.

Young people reported the lowest level of confidence in recognising whether a news story is true or false (59%) and understanding bias (57%) when compared to other groups. They also felt less confident than their

parents and teachers about recognising clickbait, and avoiding online scams, as the chart on the right shows. These findings indicate that many young people do not yet possess the critical digital literacy competencies required to engage with online information effectively.

There is also a strong desire for increasing digital literacy in schools and colleges. Teachers were overwhelmingly supportive (84%) of introducing new digital literacy content and potentially exams. While they raised pertinent questions about implementation, guidance and curriculum time – which will be discussed in more detail later in the report – teachers are in favour of more digital literacy for young people.

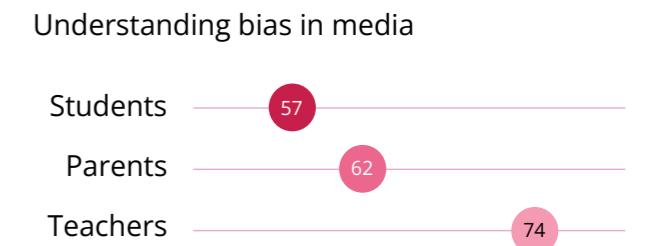


84% of teachers support the introduction of new digital literacy content and/or exams.

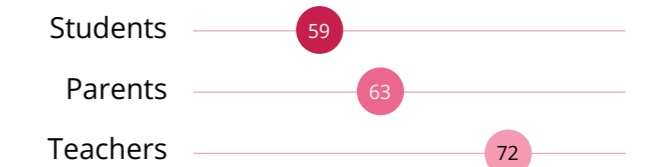
Our findings indicate that there is a broad appetite for increased digital literacy in schools, particularly from parents and senior leaders in schools. A third of parents (32%), over a third of headteachers (38%) and nearly half of Deputy/Assistant Headteachers (45%) responded that they thought the focus on digital skills was too low in schools. All groups polled reported that some of top skills and knowledge they think students should learn about were online safety and digital literacy. Students told us they want more digital literacy (59%) and online safety (53%).

Media Studies teachers AQA has spoken to also regularly report that while students use digital platforms constantly, they often lack the conceptual tools to analyse how content is constructed, how it circulates, and how their own data shapes what they see.

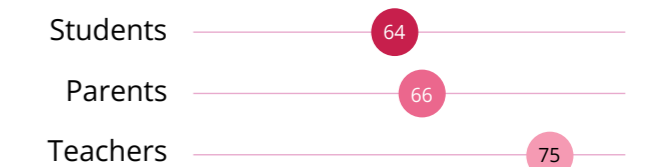
Question: Do you feel confident in each of the following...? (%)



Recognising whether a news story is true or false



Evaluating sources of information



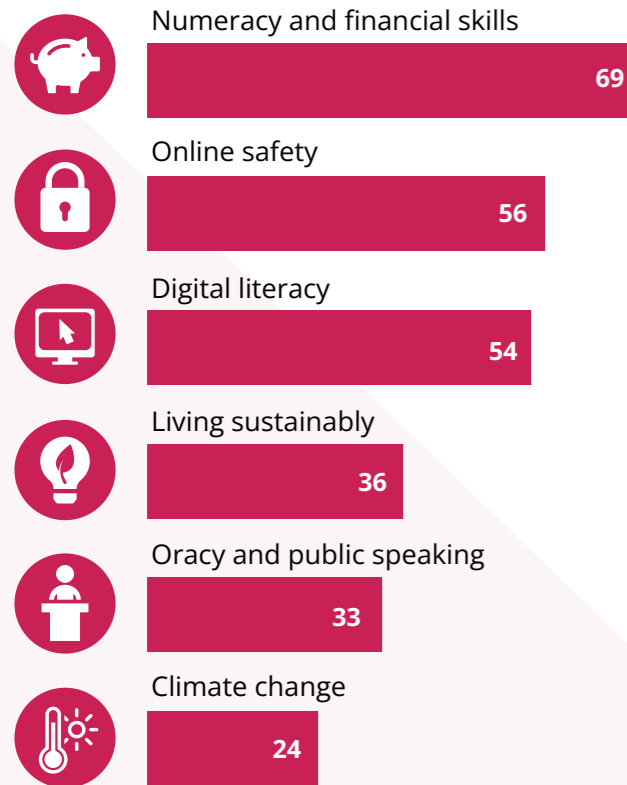
Recognising clickbait



Recognising and avoiding online scams



Question: Which three of the following, if any, would you most like schools to teach more of / to learn (%)



Specific digital literacy skills and knowledge

When we asked about specific digital literacy skills, we heard loud and clear that there are a broad range of skills and knowledge that respondents thought students could improve.

The most common areas chosen for possible improvement are shown in the chart below.

Question: Which of the following digital skills, if any, do you think students could improve on? (%)



A broad range of other competencies were also mentioned.

In focus groups, teachers and senior leaders also focused on a broad range of different digital skills that young people could improve. In particular, many senior leaders emphasised a lack of core skills necessary for using digital technology.

“ Touch typing is more and more becoming a more valuable skill than handwriting for many students. ”

Senior Leader

“Students use tech constantly, but many lack the basic digital skills needed for academic work. The digital divide is substantial.” – Senior Leader

“Learners feel confident using and choosing the right communication methods, but many still see themselves as beginners when it comes to tools like Excel. Our students show real variation in workplace-aligned digital skills, especially in researching and interrogating information.” – Senior Leader

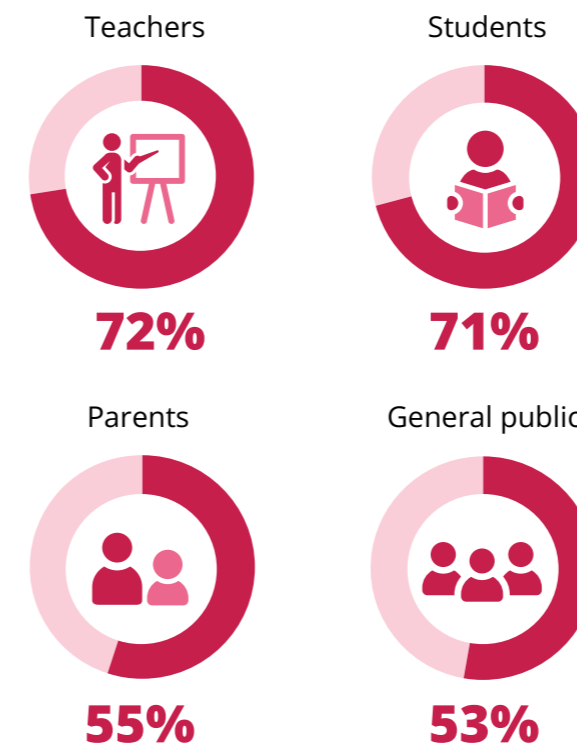
Early adoption of technology

When we asked whether they were early adopters of technology, young people (71%) and teachers (72%) were much more likely to report they were early adopters than parents (55%) or the public (53%).

It is unsurprising that young people are earlier adopters of technology, as young people have grown up in a more digital world than older generations. [Peer pressure](#) could also play a role as the desire to have the latest technology is strong among young people.

Interestingly, teachers were much quicker adopters of technology than parents or the public. Perhaps when teachers see their students using new technologies, apps or devices, they explore these tools themselves to better understand the technology their students are using.

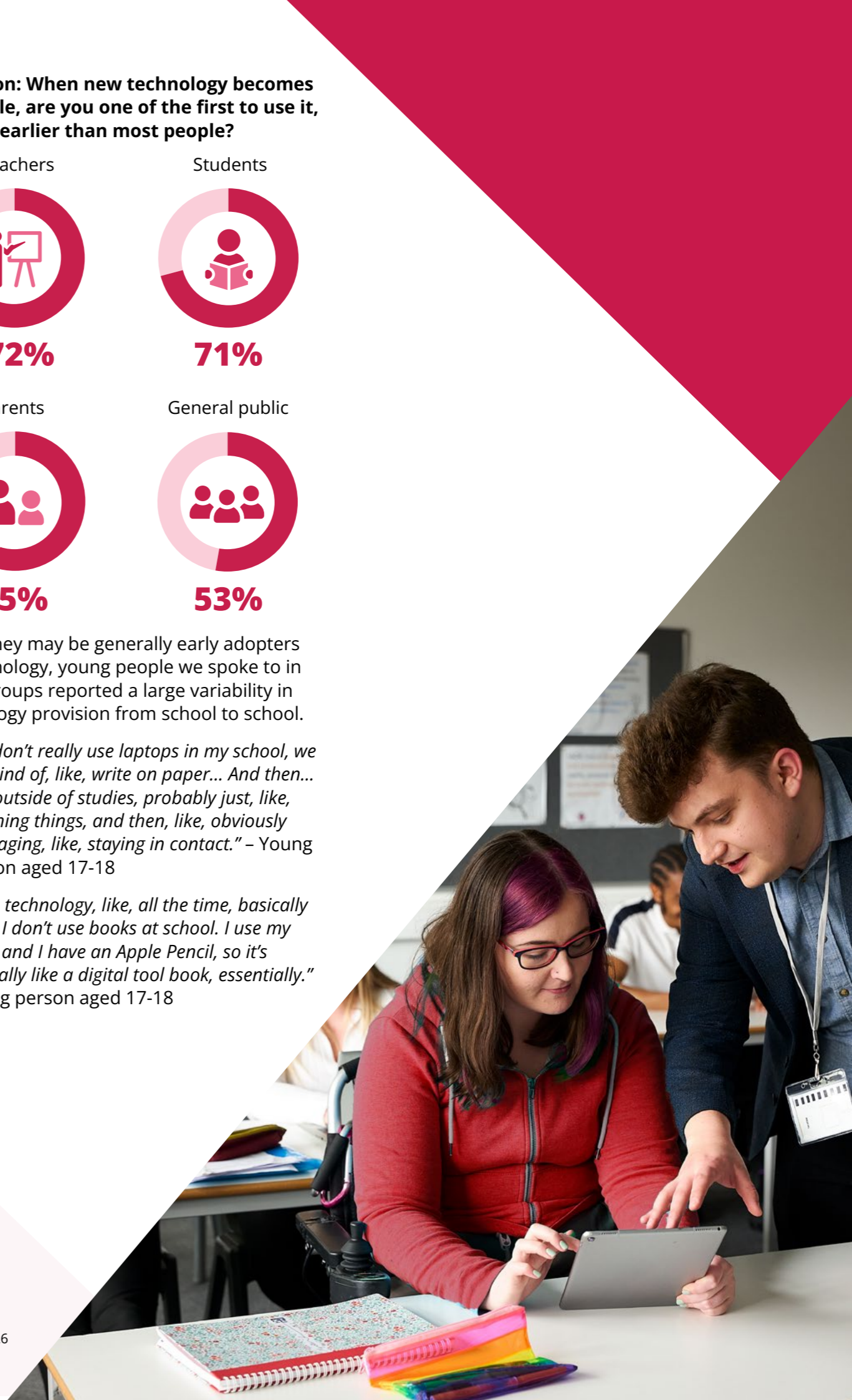
Question: When new technology becomes available, are you one of the first to use it, and/or earlier than most people?



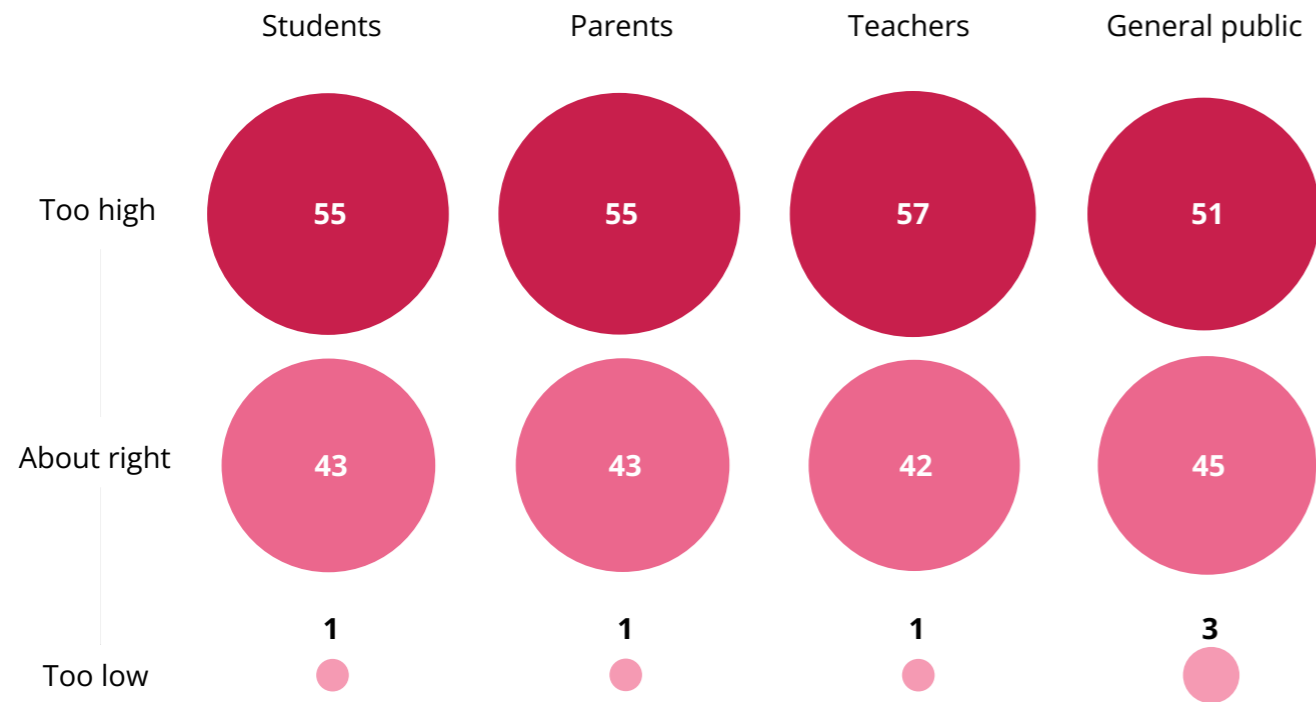
While they may be generally early adopters of technology, young people we spoke to in focus groups reported a large variability in technology provision from school to school.

“We don't really use laptops in my school, we just kind of, like, write on paper... And then... like, outside of studies, probably just, like, watching things, and then, like, obviously messaging, like, staying in contact.” – Young person aged 17-18

“I use technology, like, all the time, basically 24-7. I don't use books at school. I use my iPad, and I have an Apple Pencil, so it's basically like a digital tool book, essentially.” Young person aged 17-18



Question: How would you describe the frequency of your own technology usage? (%)



Don't know - Students 1%; Teachers 0%; Parents 1%; General public 2%

Young people's lack of digital skills

But early adoption of new technologies does not automatically lead to digital literacy.

Fourteen per cent of young people told us they had not been taught how to spot misinformation in school, which suggests that some students are adopting new tools without developing the critical and practical skills needed to use them confidently.

"We haven't been taught it, we just used it." (referring to ChatGPT) – Student in Year 7-9 focus group.

What emerges from these findings is a picture of young people adopting technology at rapid rates, far faster than their parents and the general population, but without necessarily being taught how to use it properly or safely. They are learning as they go, through trial and error, which presents a significant risk.



Only 51% of search engine users were able to identify sponsored links on search engine results.

Research by Internet Matters has found that children now see [harmful content](#) at similar rates, including self-harm content and content promoting unrealistic body types. [Ofcom](#) has found that a third (33%) of internet users aged 13+ had encountered scams, frauds and phishing.



17% of internet users have responded inappropriately to a fake email.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to harms, so we need to rethink how we teach them to engage with digital media safely and securely.

Teachers who took part in our focus groups also worried that students, despite their quick adoption of technology, were naïve in their usage of technology.

In our focus groups, young people told us about their tech usage and a startling picture emerged of young people learning for themselves about technology and digital platforms, without safety guardrails in place.

“Everyone in our class had ... two or three apps that they weren't old enough for ... like SnapChat, TikTok, WhatsApp.”
Student in Year 7-9 Focus Group

"I think it's important for everyone to ... know ... how to be safe on the internet, because schools may not teach everyone that." – Student in Year 7-9 Focus Group

"Scams especially ... [are] getting more and more complex and real-looking ... I've fallen for a lot of them [that] look legit." – Student in Year 12-13 focus group

"A lot of people think, 'Oh, it can't be me, I'm too smart, I know too much.' So, a lot of people don't pay attention." – Student in Year 12-13 focus group

Young people deserve stronger digital literacy

There is a pressing need to ensure that young people are given a more robust education in digital literacy which helps them to navigate digital technology in a safe manner. Without this foundation, young people can find it difficult to judge what information is reliable and to make informed decisions. The growing availability of misinformation, AI-generated content and convincing deepfakes makes this increasingly important.

[Recent research](#) has shown an urgent need to improve logical thinking among adolescents to help them [analyse and critically assess](#) online information. The [Nuffield Foundation](#) found a strong positive relationship between news literacy and civic engagement in school-aged children; this means that without proper education in digital media literacy, young people may fall foul of [conspiracy theories](#) and disengage with civic participation.

Indeed, the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee [has recommended](#) that education

be reformed to develop political education and engage new young voters in democracy. A recent House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee report highlighted a potential [‘threat to democracy’](#) if digital media literacy is not improved. In the Government's response to the House of Lords report, the Government notes that:

"Media literacy is a foundational skill in the digital age, essential for enabling individuals to critically engage with content, navigate complex information environments, and make informed decisions." – [Government Response](#) to House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee's 3rd Report of Session 2024–25 on "Media literacy"

Media Studies GCSE already assesses applied digital literacy through production work, audience analysis and engagement with real world media industries and many Media Studies departments already have strong frameworks for assessing critical digital engagement. It could be that Media Studies GCSE might act as framework for teaching source evaluation, deepfakes, multimodal communication and the ethics of digital creation, which could be tailored for other subject specific contexts.

A lack of digital literacy affects young people and society more broadly. Those without digital skills risk missing out on the benefits of digital technologies while remaining more exposed to the harms. They are also more likely to misunderstand or misinterpret online content, particularly in an environment where misinformation and AI-generated material can appear convincing.

This contributes to a widening skills gap between those who are digitally confident and well-resourced and those who are not.

Making digital literacy a reality: Where would it fit in the school day?

Embedding digital literacy across the system

Taken together, the research and polling demonstrate a clear need for action and a readiness among stakeholders for change. Curriculum and assessment reform is already underway. The Curriculum and Assessment Review and the Government's response, alongside Ofqual's consultation on digital exams, signal a clear shift in direction.

The Government has also proposed new post-16 qualifications, including V-levels and Foundation Certificates, with Digital among the subjects to be introduced. Together, this activity creates a practical opportunity to embed digital literacy more consistently and effectively across the system, making this an appropriate moment to move from diagnosis to recommendations.

This creates an opportunity to consider how best to support schools and colleges in developing young people's digital literacy. However, the school day is already crowded and adding further content without reducing existing demand is unrealistic. This is why AQA has argued for a [reduction in curriculum content](#) and assessment volume, while maintaining fairness. Streamlining what is taught would give schools the space to focus on core knowledge and to explore how digital literacy can be incorporated more effectively.

What teachers and young people told us

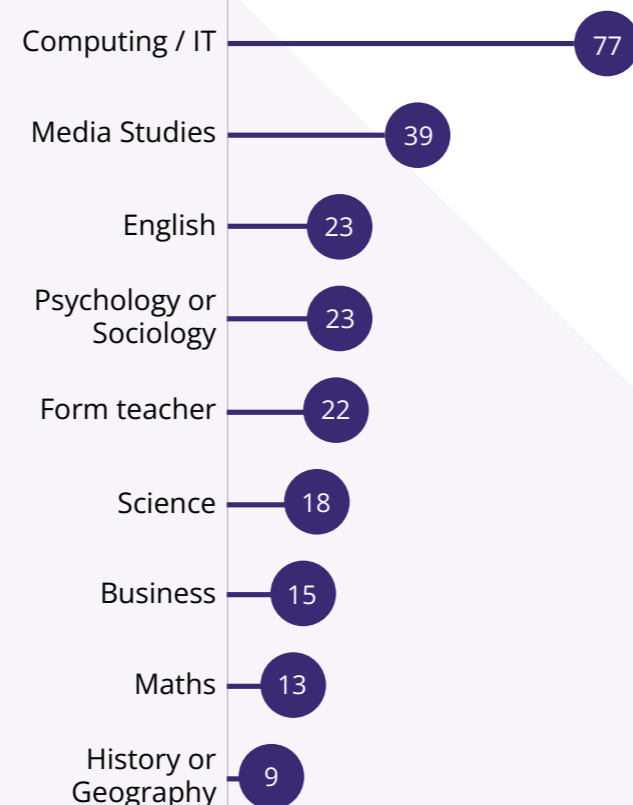
To explore where digital literacy might best fit in the school day and curriculum, AQA asked students and teachers their views. In conversations we have had with teachers, Computing was seen as the place for some

digital literacy, but that other subjects should include elements of digital tool use and safety.

"As a trainee teacher, like, I've just had to do a fundamental maths and English skills audit and stuff, right? But what if there was an AI skills audit?" – Teacher

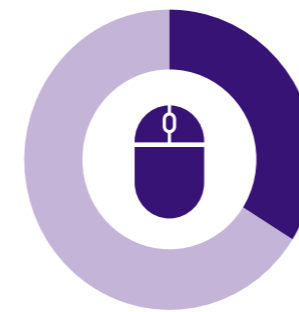
"I think it depends, obviously, on the individual teachers. I know there's an awful lot of teachers who I know who would probably be incredibly intimidated by the fact that they were having to do something that was completely out of their comfort zone." – Teacher

Question: Which subject teachers would be best to teach you about digital literacy and misinformation? (%)



When we asked young people which teacher they thought would be best to deliver digital literacy and misinformation content, young people we surveyed reported that they thought Computer Science/Computing or IT teachers (77%) would be the best to deliver this content, with the next best being Media Studies teachers (39%).

However, AQA has spoken to Computing teachers who feel that all teachers should improve their knowledge and skills with a view to incorporating more digital technology into other subject areas.



34%
of respondents thought that digital literacy should be a standalone subject.

When we asked where respondents thought digital literacy would best fit in lessons, the picture was more nuanced. Most respondents felt that digital literacy should be part of existing Computing lessons (54%), although a sizable minority felt that it should be integrated into other subjects (36%), or as a standalone subject (34%)

International examples of digital literacy

This chimes with how digital literacy has been included in curricula in countries with high digital literacy.



Australia has a core 'Digital Technologies' subject but also embeds digital skills in all subjects.

While some of the more technical components of digital literacy may be included in a core Computing or Technology curriculum as is the case in Australia, most of the elements comprising digital literacy are embedded in each subject. This allows them to be taught and assessed within each subject-specific context.

Finland has an extremely high level of digital literacy, with a strong focus in schools on the idea of 'Digital Bildung'. This is a German

loanword which refers to the combination of skills, knowledge, experience and moral development necessary for personal development.



Examinations in Finnish schools have been fully digital since 2019.

More information on international case studies is available in Annex B.

A standalone digital literacy qualification?

When we asked teachers about what they viewed as the ideal vehicle for digital literacy in schools, there was broad agreement that it would not work well as a standalone qualification.

There was consensus that digital literacy would better fit if it was embedded within curriculum under a 'Quality of Education' strand. When asked when in their schooling students should be introduced to digital literacy, there was broad agreement that it should be embedded throughout all Key Stages so that they encounter it regularly as part of a recurring curriculum rather than just at one point in their education.

"You'll be playing catch-up with what they've kind of learned themselves, otherwise, trying to challenge stuff that they've kind of picked up on their own, whereas I think the... honestly, the earlier the better. Someone said key stage one, I 100% agree." – Teacher

“Everyone is going digital, so you shouldn't have any age limitation. Everyone should be infused in it and grow in it.”

Teacher

“I was thinking... rather than, like, computer science or English or anything, I was thinking this would be more part of, like, PSHE. Because it seems like it's more for the personal development, it's not really an academic thing, it's a personal thing.”

Teacher

There were also concerns about the practical time constraints of a congested curriculum time. Teachers told us that while they agree digital literacy is an important gap within the curriculum, there is limited space to fit it in. In [AQA's response](#) to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, we agreed the curriculum is crowded and identified areas where it could be pared back.



45%
of teachers said limited timetable space was a key challenge for new digital literacy content.

High content pressures mean there can be insufficient time to 'master' fundamental knowledge before building further. Reducing the overall content can be done in a sensitive, practical way without compromising validity.

We stand ready to work with the Government, DfE and Ofqual, to reduce the content in courses, which will free up time for schools to master fundamental digital literacy.

Making digital literacy a reality: Supporting schools and teachers

The Curriculum and Assessment Review recommended that digital literacy content should primarily be delivered via the Computing curriculum, though it also recommends that other subjects should also incorporate elements of digital literacy, giving the specific examples of awareness of online harms and safety being addressed in RSHE and critical evaluation of online content being covered in Citizenship.

Digital literacy exams

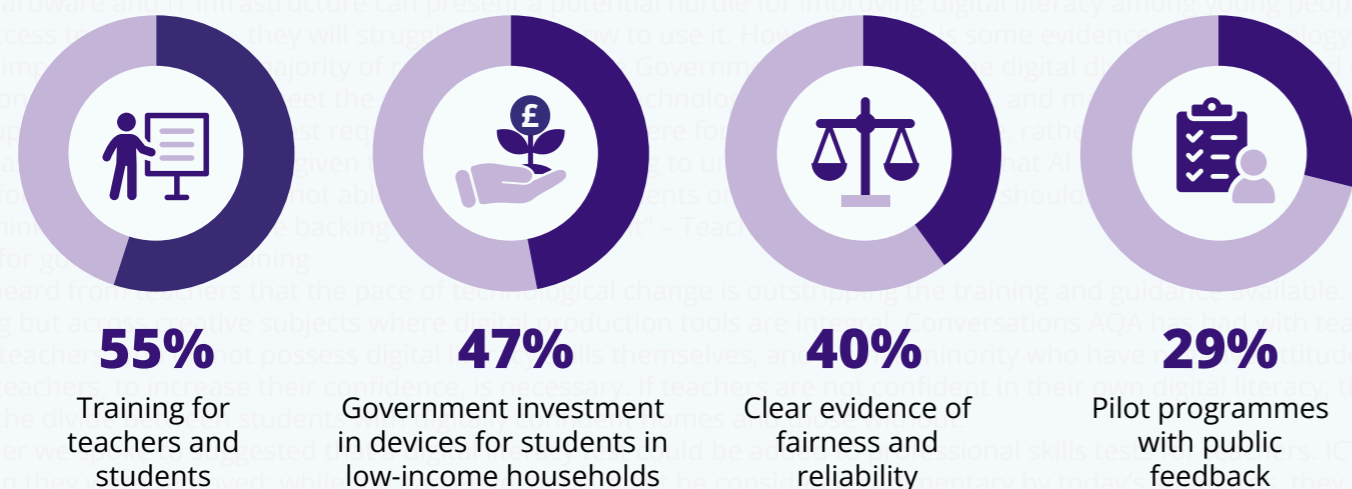
To understand more about what support schools and colleges might want, we asked what might increase their support for digital literacy exams. Training for teachers and students (55%) was the most popular option selected, with nearly two-thirds of teachers (62%) asking for training for themselves and their students. Guidance, advice and training are crucial to support the effective delivery of digital literacy education, which can be a complicated and fast-evolving area.

Feedback from teachers also indicated limited support for introducing a standalone digital literacy qualification or examination. Teachers were clear that they did not want an additional subject or assessment burden. In response, we are focusing on how best to embed digital literacy within the existing curriculum rather than creating a separate course.

Technology infrastructure

A lack of hardware and IT infrastructure can present a potential hurdle for improving digital literacy among young people; without access to technology, they will struggle to learn how to use it. However, there is some evidence that technology in schools is improving, with the majority of respondents to the Government's [Narrowing the digital divide in schools and colleges](#) consultation stating they could meet the six core digital and technology standards by 2030, and many already meeting them. In our focus groups,

Question: What, if anything, would increase your support for digital literacy exams in schools? (%)



Other: I already support it - 10%, Nothing would change my mind - 7%

some of the strongest requests from teachers were for training and guidance, rather than tech.

“Certainly as educators, we aren’t given the tools or the training to understand the impact that AI could have in a positive or negative way, and therefore, I do feel like we’re not able to fully instruct students on what they should or shouldn’t be doing, and how they should be using AI. And I think a lot of schools are backing off from it a little bit” – Teacher.

The need for guidance and training

We have heard from teachers that the pace of technological change is outstripping the training and guidance available. This is not just the case in Computing but across creative subjects where digital production tools are integral. Conversations AQA has had with teachers have highlighted that there are many teachers who do not possess digital literacy skills themselves, and a small minority who have negative attitudes towards technology. The need to upskill teachers, to increase their confidence, is necessary. If teachers are not confident in their own digital literacy, the burden falls to families, which risks widening the divide between students with digitally confident homes and those without.

One teacher we spoke to suggested that a digital literacy test could be added to professional skills tests for teachers. ICT tests were part of the QTS skills tests until 2012, when they were removed; while the earlier versions might be considered rudimentary by today’s standards, they could be updated for today’s teachers. This requirement could be expanded to include current teachers too; these are suggestions, rather than firm recommendations, intended to prompt thought and reflection.

To embed an effective digital literacy in schools, teachers identified the need for effective training and guidance. There was also discussion of the need for clear benchmarks that individual subject departments within schools could use, as well as the need to map opportunities to deliver digital literacy against areas of the curriculum for each subject.

“ The real barrier is infrastructure, not student capability. One of the big issues is keeping track of work across a mixed economy of paper and digital systems ”

Senior Leader

A focal point or leader within the school responsible for coordinating digital literacy teaching and learning was also identified as a practical way to drive digital literacy. For example, when asked what would motivate teachers to take on responsibility, one teacher responded that a [teaching and learning responsibility](#) (TLR) needs to be attached to the role.

The strongest point of agreement was on the need for any digital literacy course to be supported by high quality ‘plug-and-play’ teaching resources that could cut down on planning time and could easily be taught by non-specialists. Teachers noted that this works well for other PSHE style lessons. To be useful, teachers suggested materials should also benefit teachers’ own digital literacy. Teachers suggested that a partnership model for developing such resources (between tech companies, schools and the DfE, for instance) was essential, as schools could not create high quality resources themselves.

Any education intervention or change in policy is delivered by a teacher, in a classroom, to a cohort of young people. To make any rollout a success, schools and colleges need proper support to help deliver lessons on technical and sensitive subjects.

Making digital literacy a reality: Opportunities across the curriculum

The Government has made its position clear that Computing is the place for the most structured focus on core digital literacy skills. However, while Computing has long been a compulsory part of the National Curriculum up until the end of Key Stage 4, computing education can be variable for many students.

Provision can be varied owing to a variety of factors, meaning that despite the best intentions of teachers and school leaders, not every student will receive high quality digital literacy education.

Into Key Stage 4 and above, not everyone will take Computer Science GCSE so reform's impact in this space could be limited. The Government's commitment to rebalance the Computing curriculum is welcome, and we support their plans to develop essential digital skills such as AI literacy among students. The Government has announced they will replace the Computer Science GCSE with a GCSE in Computing to reflect the breadth of the curriculum.

Opportunities in Computing

Computing is an appropriate place to teach early digital literacy through Key Stages 1 and 2, and we agree with the Government's proposals for Computing to be a vehicle for digital literacy. A revised 'Computing GCSE' could help to improve digital literacy among a wider cohort of learners, from the most digitally naïve to the most digitally astute.

However, if we want to improve digital literacy for all young people, Computing alone may be insufficient. As students move through Key Stage 3 and into Key Stage 4 and beyond, they still need to have their digital

literacy knowledge and skills developed. Computing may not be the best vehicle for this cohort of students in Key Stage 4 and beyond, given wider time constraints. Digital literacy can be taught in a variety of lessons and should be, to ensure that all students gain the breadth of skills and knowledge necessary to be digitally fluent.

Opportunities across the curriculum

There are opportunities to strengthen digital literacy across a range of subjects where it is pedagogically appropriate. Digital literacy can be incorporated within numerous subjects, for example:

English Literature and Language

Knowledge of rhetoric, persuasion, propaganda, and linguistic tools could be used to decode digital texts and misinformation.

Geography

Students could use GIS⁵ to analyse maps and data.

Modern Foreign Languages

Students could critique the translation attempts of large language models, or use LLMs to hold more real-time conversations in the target language.

Art and Design

Students could explore the development of digital art.

RSHE and PSHE

These subjects offer space to examine misinformation and issues such as AI-generated deepfakes.

Media Studies

Media Studies could incorporate more systematic interrogation of media content, the identification of misinformation, and an understanding of news production processes.

A structured framework

Taken together, these opportunities show that digital literacy can be meaningfully embedded across the curriculum.

To make this scalable and coherent, schools would benefit from a structured framework. Teachers have told us they are not in favour of a standalone qualification or 'Digital Literacy GCSE' and would prefer to explore how digital literacy could be integrated throughout the secondary curriculum.

A framework of digital skills would be of benefit to this, to show evidence of digital literacy across multiple subjects and disciplines. A potential framework could guide curriculum planning and provide a structure that schools can apply flexibly across subjects, including subjects such as English, mathematics, PSHE and the arts. Flexibility in a framework would mean that whatever path students are taking, there would be an opportunity to focus on the skills that are most useful for them.

5. GIS is a technology that is used to create, manage, analyse, and map all types of data. [Mapping and GIS - Geographical Association](#)



Models for digital literacy

A pre-existing framework which could serve as a model is currently used in Ireland (a case study of digital literacy in Ireland is available in Annex B). Digital literacy is integrated into the earliest stages of learning in Ireland, forming a core pillar of the curriculum alongside literacy and numeracy.



In Ireland, digital literacy is fully integrated into the curriculum and staff are fully supported in implementing this.

Ireland established a Digital Learning Framework website to support schools and teachers in understanding the requirements of the framework and the current stage of their development, along with the next steps. It supports schools with upskilling their teaching staff and supports teaching staff in integrating digital learning methods and skills into their lessons.

For any framework to be usable in practice, subject associations would need to be involved to evaluate a bank of exemplar materials and proforma lesson resources

across a range of disciplines. This collaborative approach would enable subject-specific interpretation of digital literacy while maintaining coherence across the wider curriculum.

To assess or not to assess

There are a variety of options for how best to deliver digital literacy education, as well as how – and whether – to assess it formally.

Embedding digital literacy across numerous subjects allows them to be taught and assessed within each subject-specific context. These are early suggestions, presented to prompt discussion and idea generation, rather than as firm recommendations. AQA stands ready to work with Government to explore opportunities for embedding digital literacy across multiple subjects, to ensure all young people can develop their skills, knowledge, and confidence.

Post-16

At post-16, particularly for students progressing into colleges or more technical pathways, the landscape is more complex.

The Department for Education is exploring the potential of a new Level 3 qualification in AI and Data Science, which may provide a route for vocational learners outside traditional school settings. Current post-16 reforms aim to reduce NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) levels and strengthen progression pathways. Achieving these aims will require learners to communicate digitally, access online learning and assessment, produce digital artefacts, and engage with workplace technologies.

Embedding digital literacy across programmes taken by a range of post-16 students would support learners on vocational and technical programmes, help learners access their course content, enable GCSE resit learners to apply English skills in digital contexts, and build early confidence with digital tools for Level 1 English students.

The new Level 1 English qualification offers a potential mechanism for embedding

foundational digital literacy, given its role in preparing learners for GCSE, supporting those furthest from Level 2, and developing confidence and fluency. Embedding digital literacy at this level could strengthen employability skills, provide consistency of exposure, and help build a more equitable baseline across further education settings.

Post-16 white paper

Overall, the proposals outlined in the [Post-16 education and skills white paper](#) create an opportunity to develop new digital literacy pathways.

English, and potentially the Level 1 qualification or its supporting resources, could serve as a foundation for digital literacy content, with vocational areas embedding applied digital literacy alongside literacy and oracy. Also, as Level 1 qualifications have smaller uptake than GCSE English Language in a summer exam series, the logistics of increasing digital literacy within them are more feasible.

As identified in the Government's [Post-16 Level 3 and Below Pathways](#) consultation, non-qualification activities, such as work experience and other employability, enrichment and pastoral activities, play an important part in post-16 study. This could be a route to support vocational students to develop digital literacy across their programme of study.

Clear definitions of digital literacy for each subject or vocational area will be essential for successful implementation.

Conclusion

As we have demonstrated throughout this report, digital literacy is now as fundamental as reading, writing and numeracy. It is essential for everything from safeguarding, spotting misinformation, employability and democratic participation.

With curriculum reform, teacher support, and digital literacy reform, the system can equip every young person with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate a digital world safely and successfully.

As we have shown in this report, young people engage extensively with digital technology across many aspects of their lives. However, high levels of use do not always translate into the deeper skills needed to navigate digital environments confidently. Young people are prolific users of social media, but the evidence indicates that young people might be more 'digitally naïve' than is sometimes assumed.

The risks of inaction are serious

The current and future labour market have strong demands for digital literacy. Future educational assessment methods may also require increased digital skills. This could result in young people without the confidence or tools to use the digital which they will need, whatever the next step looks like for them as they leave compulsory education.

A mix of changing workplace skills, misinformation and AI-generated content present risks to young people's career

prospects and online safety. Without targeted action, disparities in digital confidence are likely to widen and become further entrenched within the system.

As we have demonstrated, there is a demand for high-quality digital literacy education in schools. Students, their parents, and teachers all told us that digital literacy, online safety, and spotting misinformation are priorities. But schools and colleges need support to deliver high quality digital literacy in the long term.

The time is ripe for change

Curriculum and assessment reform is already underway with the Government committing to strengthening digital literacy and Ofqual exploring digital on-screen assessments. Reforming how digital literacy is taught presents an opportunity to align education with wider societal goals of increasing digitisation and introduction of innovative technologies.

We need to ensure digital literacy is taught to all students, throughout their education.

Digital literacy includes elements of critical evaluation, online safety, and AI awareness, which naturally occur across multiple disciplines. Evidence from international systems with high digital literacy (Finland, Ireland, Australia, and India, see Annex B) show how integrating these skills across subjects from early education onwards can have huge impacts.

AQA's role

AQA is keen to play its role by developing robust digital literacy content and, where appropriate, assessments. We can advise on subject content and design implementable models for embedding digital literacy across subjects.

Policymakers now have a window to make meaningful, system wide change. This report has explored:



Where digital literacy could fit in the school day



How best to support schools to deliver digital literacy



Opportunities for embedding digital literacy across the curriculum more broadly

Digital literacy must now be treated as a core entitlement. With the right policy choices, we can ensure every young person leaves education able to navigate digital life safely, think critically and thrive in an increasingly digital world. AQA looks forward to working with Government and the sector to make this a reality.



Annex A:

Common elements of digital literacy definitions

The following is based on the work of Jonathon Dean, Researcher, AQA.

	Eshet-Alkalai	Ng	Coldwell-Neilson	UNICEF
Understanding graphical displays	Yes	Yes		Yes
Reproduction skills	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-linear navigation	Yes	Yes		
Critical evaluation of information & sources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online safety		Yes	Yes	Yes
Online etiquette	Yes	Yes		Yes
Social networking		Yes		Yes
Operational ICT skills		Yes	Yes	Yes
Real-time thinking	Yes			
Communication and collaboration			Yes	Yes
Data management			Yes	Yes
Privacy and security			Yes	Yes
Managing digital identity			Yes	Yes
Learning and scholarship skills				
Content creation			Yes	Yes
Habits and wellbeing			Yes	Yes
Copyright and legal requirements				Yes
Searching and filtering content				Yes
Problem-solving skills				Yes
Engaging in citizenship digitally				Yes
Career-related competences				Yes

Annex B:

International case studies of digital literacy

Finland

Finland has an extremely high level of digital literacy and adopted its 'Digital Compass' national strategy in 2022 to focus on expanding digital literacy skills and adoption across all levels of society. This comes alongside improving digital infrastructure across the country to meet the goals of the EU's Digital Decade initiative which aims to improve digital skills, connectivity, business and public services across the bloc.

It works within the European Commission's 'digital competence' model, with a strong focus on the idea of 'Digital Bildung.' The German loanword 'Bildung' (which refers to the combination of skills, knowledge, experience and moral development necessary for personal development) is applied to the development of digital skills, allowing the same focus on helping students to acquire the tools to help them develop as an individual and member of society as well as a user of technology.

In developing this 'Digital Bildung,' Finland begins digital literacy training in early childhood education, with children being expected to understand how to use digital devices, healthy and responsible use habits, and to understand the risks of using digital technology before the end of their preschool curriculum. Digital skills are then developed through every stage of education and integrated into all subjects at all levels.

One of the major ways Finland has embedded digital learning across all levels of education was to establish a 'National Library of Open Education' (aoe.fi) in conjunction with the National Library of Finland. This is a public multimedia digital learning platform offering an online library of freely available digital educational materials for learners (such as

videos, educational games and activities, virtual reality simulations, etc.) as well as guidance and lesson plans for teaching staff. These are free to access and are donated to the service by teachers, universities, libraries and museums around Finland, with the intention that all classrooms should be able to access and utilise digital learning materials. This service is widely used in Finland in schools, adult education and personal study settings.

Examinations in Finnish schools have been fully digital since 2019, utilising a bespoke digital test environment called Abitti. This is run from a USB drive on the students' own devices and allows them to use a set-up that they are already familiar with. This has led to a rapid adoption of digital technology at all levels of education, with personal laptops largely replacing pen and paper as the standard working mode in classrooms. An updated browser-based version (Abitti 2) is due to be implemented in late 2026, which has been made open source so that the same system can be used by universities and other organisations for their own entrance exams.

In summary, Finland:

- Defines Digital Literacy in terms of the digital skills required for personal development
- Begins Digital Literacy training in preschool and embeds it in every subject throughout schooling.
- Operates a free national library of digital learning materials available to all teachers and learners.
- Conducts exams fully digitally, leading to classwork also becoming largely digital.

Ireland

Ireland is another country within the European context with a high level of computer literacy. It adopted a 'Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027' framework in 2022 as part of a wider 'Digital Ireland' strategy as part of the EU's 'Digital Decade' initiative.

The goal of this strategy is to develop a 'digital education ecosystem' where digital technology is embedded throughout all subjects in the curriculum at all levels, as well as at all stages of teacher training and professional development.

Ireland intends to take a 'pedagogy first, technology second' approach to the use of technology in the classroom, using technology in ways that add value to the learning experience and allow for new teaching styles and interactive learning, rather than merely being used to replicate traditional approaches.

The implementation plan for the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 comes in three pillars:

1. Embedding digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment
2. Digital technology infrastructure in schools
3. Looking to the future: policy, research and digital leadership, including alignment with future EU projects and new emergent technologies

Digital literacy is integrated into the earliest stages of learning in Ireland, forming a core pillar of the curriculum alongside literacy and numeracy. A new ten-year Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy lays out the requirements at every stage of the curriculum and is designed to equip children with the skills to navigate an evolving digital landscape from preschool years onwards.

To assist with this, Ireland established a Digital Learning Framework website to support schools and teachers in understanding the requirements of the framework and the current stage of their

development, along with the next steps. It supports schools with upskilling their teaching staff and supports teaching staff in integrating digital learning methods and skills into their lessons.

The Irish Department for Education maintains a collaboratively produced database of multimedia resources ('Scoilnet') which allows users to freely access resources sourced from government sources, teacher-uploaded content and trusted websites, and organise them into customised "learning paths" which can be easily shared with a single URL.

There are also plans to integrate this with a wider 'European Digital Education Hub' in the near future. However, consultation with teaching staff has revealed that many teachers were not aware that this resource exists and what it contains, necessitating an awareness campaign to help teaching staff utilise the resources which are available to them.

In summary, Ireland:

- Works within the EU's digital competence framework
- Classes Digital Literacy as a core pillar of the curriculum alongside literacy and numeracy
- Has a national strategy to assist schools and teachers in integrating digital learning methods
- Maintains a collaborative database of digital learning resources.

Australia

Australia's education system, including digital education strategies, has historically been a state-level competence, with Australia's first national curriculum being introduced in 2010. The current version of the Australian national curriculum treats Digital Literacy as a core part of the curriculum from Foundation (Reception) year onwards.

Australia identifies the core features of Digital Literacy as:

- Critically identifying and appropriately selecting and using digital devices and systems
- Learning to make the most of the technologies available to them
- Adapting to new ways of doing things as technologies evolve
- Protecting the safety of themselves and others in and around digital environments

The Australian curriculum's Digital Literacy learning continuum is organised into four elements, each with three sub-elements:

1. Practising digital safety and wellbeing
 - Managing online safety
 - Managing digital privacy and identity
 - Managing digital wellbeing
2. Investigating
 - Locating information
 - Acquiring and collating data
 - Interpreting data
3. Creating and exchanging
 - Planning
 - Creating, communicating and collaborating
 - Respecting intellectual property

4. Managing and operating

- Managing content
- Protecting content
- Selecting and operating tools

The majority of these skills and behaviours are taught within the subject area of 'Digital technologies', which is considered a core subject by the Australian curriculum. However, the skills and concepts learned are consolidated and expanded on across all learning areas and subjects according to the specific context requirements.

Digital Literacy is therefore incorporated into the Australian curriculum through the explicit teaching of Digital Technologies as a core subject, through incorporating digital skills as a competency throughout all subjects, and through the use of digital technology as a learning tool across all subjects.

In summary, Australia:

- Defines Digital Literacy largely in terms of safely finding, understanding, creating and managing information in a digital environment.
- Incorporates Digital Literacy as a core curriculum component from the first school year.
- Teaches most competencies in a core 'Digital Technologies' subject, but also incorporates them into all other subjects.

India

India's context is very different to the European and Australian contexts due to the large disparities in terms of resources, infrastructure and digital literacy between rich and poor states and between urban and rural areas.

The Indian Government defines Digital Literacy as 'the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within life situations', which is an interesting departure from the European and Australian models of Digital Literacy due to the inclusion of 'communities', in contrast to the purely individualist definitions used by the other contexts.

Most Indian states do not have a formal ICT or Computing class as part of their state curriculum, and many of those which do have done so by partnering with international companies and organisations to provide devices, lessons and teacher training.

To address the gap in digital literacy, India adopted the National Digital Literacy Mission in 2015 with an initial aim of ensuring at least one person from each family is IT literate to a basic level, which included funded training for a nominated person from each family aged 14-60. This included two levels of training:

1. Appreciation of Digital Literacy (Level 1): including the ability to operate digital devices, send and receive emails and search the internet for information.
2. Basics of Digital Literacy (Level 2): including accessing and using e-Governance services, online services and the basic use of office applications.

This has a clear focus on computer usage skills, in contrast with more social, safety and participatory knowledge and understanding common in more developed economies. The approach seeks to ensure that as many people as possible are able to access digital services either on their own or with assistance from a more digital literate family member.

Many of India's rural areas and poorer states still have poor internet infrastructure, however roughly 95% of the country has 3G or 4G coverage and mobile phone penetration across the country is high.

Smartphones have therefore been identified as the potential key to developing Digital Literacy in India, with education and training apps being developed by both public and private bodies across the country.

In general, the key issues in the Indian context are a shortage of qualified computing teachers, a lack of infrastructure (particularly in rural areas) and the lack of a common national digital literacy curriculum.

In summary, India:

- Includes the empowerment of communities in its understanding of Digital Literacy
- Focuses on ICT skills and accessing digital government services.
- Faces challenges of poor infrastructure and lack of trained teaching staff in poor and rural areas.
- Hopes to counter the infrastructure issue by focusing on smartphone-based tools for Digital Literacy education.

Annex C:

Key datasets

Question: Have you used any of the following programs before?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)	General Public	Age 11 to 13	Age 14 to 16	Age 17 and 18
Online banking	74%	84%	79%	51%	77%	44%	54%	68%
PowerPoint	60%	65%	77%	47%	56%	47%	50%	44%
Word	69%	75%	79%	59%	66%	56%	60%	64%
Excel	60%	67%	71%	46%	56%	42%	49%	47%
Google Docs	52%	58%	67%	41%	47%	40%	41%	45%
Photoshop	39%	41%	48%	40%	33%	38%	43%	48%
Canva	33%	30%	46%	31%	29%	33%	32%	26%
ChatGPT	59%	57%	75%	61%	53%	62%	64%	54%
Snapchat	56%	56%	61%	67%	47%	62%	71%	73%
Minecraft	40%	37%	44%	60%	31%	58%	62%	67%
Fortnite	35%	34%	37%	54%	25%	52%	59%	62%
Discord	27%	25%	32%	31%	23%	28%	33%	36%
Twitch	21%	18%	27%	24%	17%	23%	27%	26%
Don't know	1%	1%	*%	*%	2%	1%	*%	1%

Question: Have you ever shared personal information (e.g. full name, school, location) with someone you didn't know online?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)	General Public	Age 11 to 13	Age 14 to 16	Age 17 and 18
Yes	31%	27%	37%	34%	28%	38%	33%	27%
No	66%	68%	62%	63%	68%	60%	64%	70%

Question: How confident do you feel in each of the following...?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)	General Public
Recognising whether a news story is true or false	64%	63%	72%	59%	63%
Recognising and avoiding online scams	72%	73%	79%	67%	70%
Understanding bias in media	63%	62%	74%	57%	62%
Evaluating sources of information	67%	66%	75%	64%	65%
Recognising clickbait	69%	69%	77%	67%	66%
Understanding how algorithms shape what you see	55%	52%	66%	58%	51%

Question: Do you think the focus on digital skills in schools is...?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)	General Public	Age 11 to 13	Age 14 to 16	Age 17 and 18
Much too high	8%	6%	7%	9%	9%	6%	7%	7%
Slightly too high	15%	12%	20%	16%	14%	13%	12%	9%
About right	43%	44%	42%	48%	40%	43%	45%	41%
Slightly too low	24%	26%	26%	21%	22%	27%	25%	31%
Much too low	5%	6%	4%	4%	5%	5%	6%	7%
Don't know	6%	5%	2%	2%	10%	5%	5%	6%
NET: Too high	23%	18%	27%	25%	23%	19%	19%	16%
NET: Too low	28%	32%	29%	25%	27%	32%	31%	38%

Question: Which of the following digital skills, if any, do you think students could improve on?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)	General Public
Knowing how to protect yourself and your information when you're on the internet	53%	60%	53%	52%	50%
Spotting misinformation / Knowing what's real online and what's not	51%	58%	53%	48%	47%
Making documents and charts on the computer to help with schoolwork and projects (e.g. Word and Excel)	43%	46%	45%	47%	39%
Organising information and doing calculations using tools like Excel or Google Sheets	38%	44%	42%	39%	33%
Thinking about how tech is changing the way we live, work, and connect	37%	43%	38%	37%	34%
Figuring out and fixing problems with your devices or apps	36%	40%	36%	39%	32%
Learning how to build apps, games, or websites using code	34%	35%	33%	43%	29%
Getting help from smart tools like ChatGPT or image generators to learn or create	30%	29%	32%	38%	25%
Making videos, graphics, or music using creative apps	27%	27%	28%	39%	22%
Looking at numbers and information to find patterns or answers	27%	27%	28%	27%	26%
Setting up and using things like phones, tablets, smartwatches, or speakers	24%	25%	22%	29%	22%
Getting music, videos, or files in a way that's safe and respects creators	20%	19%	21%	25%	16%

Question: When new technology becomes available, how quickly do you tend to start using it, if at all?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)	General Public
I am usually one of the first among my friends and family to use it	25%	20%	31%	30%	22%
I am may not be the first, but I am earlier than most people out there when it comes to using it	36%	34%	41%	41%	31%
I start using it once it's common or after hearing others talk about it	25%	30%	20%	21%	27%
I wait until I really need to start using it	12%	13%	7%	7%	16%
I avoid using new technology if I can	2%	2%	1%	1%	4%

Question: When, if ever, have you been taught how to spot misinformation in school?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)
In PSHE (Personal, Social, Health, Economic education)	32%	31%	34%	31%
As part of my normal lessons	32%	37%	29%	27%
In a series of lessons over a period of time	30%	31%	27%	28%
In tutor time	28%	27%	29%	27%
In an assembly	25%	27%	23%	25%
In a one-off lesson	24%	23%	26%	24%
Don't know	5%	5%	5%	4%
I have never been taught how to spot misinformation in school	14%	13%	13%	17%

Question: If digital literacy lessons were offered, when do you think they would best fit within the school day?

	Total	Parents	Teachers	Student (11-18)	General Public
As part of existing computing/ ICT lessons	54%	61%	54%	56%	50%
Integrated into other subjects (e.g. English, Science)	36%	37%	40%	28%	37%
As a standalone subject	34%	36%	36%	32%	32%
Within PSHE (Personal, Social, Health, Economic) or Citizenship education	29%	29%	34%	28%	27%
Within Tutor time	26%	23%	30%	31%	23%
Afterschool club	21%	18%	25%	22%	21%
Outside of school time (i.e. as homework)	18%	15%	21%	18%	18%
Don't know	4%	4%	2%	2%	6%
None of these	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%



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April 2026