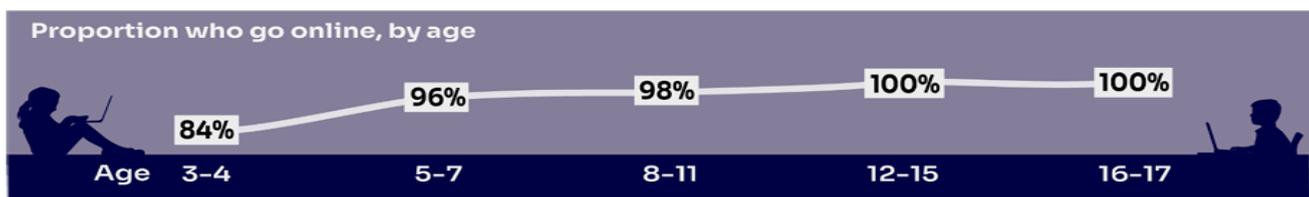


Participant Information Sheet

Title of the study: Being CyberSavvy in Cyberspace: Education’s role in supporting children and young people develop online critical thinking

Research background and purpose:

Children as young as 5 years old, now have regular access to the online digital world and are big consumers of social networks (OFCOM, 2024). Many believe children and young people are particularly vulnerable to the dangers presented by fake news accessed through social media (Vertianen et al, 2023).



However recent OECD research (2024) highlights that nearly half of 15-year-olds struggle to assess the quality of online information, particularly those identified as ‘low-performing’. These skills are essential for informed decision-making in society, especially as Artificial Intelligence (AI) shifts workforce demands towards critical thinking and distinguishing fact from opinion (OECD, 2024b). Despite this, fewer than half of students discuss the reliability of online information in classrooms, suggesting an important role for education. Current research agrees education and teachers have a role in developing children’s skills in online critical thinking, but research is scarce on teacher’s views, skills and confidence. With the current implementation of the curriculum improvement cycle, education reform and Centre for Teaching Excellence, it is vital that we consider the learning needs of teachers for today’s digital world. The study aim is to inform policy and decision-making regarding the needs of teachers to better support children and young people navigate cyberspace, in a safe and empowered way.

Research activities and timings:

- Taking part in this research is **completely voluntary**. All survey responses are **anonymous**.
- Ten National Curriculum Networks are being invited to participate in the research. If your Network wish to participate, the researcher will send your National Curriculum Network Lead a Microsoft Teams link for a Research Session as well as a copy of this Participant Information Sheet.
- If you wish to take part in the research, you should attend this Research Session. If you cannot make it but still wish to participate, please contact the researcher and she will arrange for you to attend a Research Session for all participants who wish to be involved but could not attend their own Network Research session.
- During the one hour long Research Session (June to October 2025), the researcher will support you to:
 - Complete an online survey on your confidence, skills and views of online critical thinking (15-20 minutes)
 - Complete online assessments evaluating your ability to identify fake news headlines (3 minutes) and misleading content (5 minutes) and your overall general critical thinking (5 minutes).
 - Have a debriefing session to discuss any further questions, feedback on your experience of completing the survey (including any thoughts or feelings that arose during the process of reflecting on your own skills) and provide information on next steps for the research (10 minutes)
- Demographic data identifying your age range, gender, curriculum network, stage of school you teach, length of time teaching and regional improvement collaborative area will also be collected. This will be used to analyse the results of the survey and assess whether any of these factors influence survey results.

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Risks and mitigations

- All assessments are completed using an online tool called Qualtrics. Each participant is given their own survey to complete that is unique to them. Therefore all survey responses are **anonymous**.
- Participants who attend your Network Research Session will be able to see who is participating in your session through looking at the People section of the Microsoft Teams meeting. This function of Teams details the names of all meeting attendees. All participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality of participants attending the Research Sessions and any discussions which occur during the debrief session
- There are no questions within the survey that are sensitive or expected to cause harm. There will be a debrief session immediately after the Research session to allow participants to ask any questions or share feedback.
- Although the researcher currently works for Education Scotland, this research is not being carried out on behalf of Education Scotland. This research is part of her personal doctorate studies. Therefore although the researcher hopes to use the research findings to inform policy, there will be no detrimental impact if potential participants choose not to be involved in the research. All participation is completely voluntary for individuals and curriculum networks.

Confidentiality and data management

- The researcher and her university supervisors will have sole access to all data and will be using the University of Strathclyde's statistical software to collate, process and analyse the data.
- All data will be securely stored in a password-protected folder within the University of Strathclyde's OneDrive system, which requires multi-factorial authentication for access and in accordance with the university's data storage policy. OneDrive provides robust data protection features and controlled access, ensuring data security during the data storage period.
- All personal data will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation. Please read University of Strathclyde's [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#) for more information about your rights under the legislation.
- Consent forms will be retained by the researcher and University for as long as there is a need to access the information for research purposes and also in the unfortunate case of an unanticipated problem or complaint.

Contact information and withdrawal

- If at any time, you no longer wish to take part in the research there are several ways you can withdraw anonymously and without any aftereffects:
 - you can choose whether you wish to attend your Research Session
 - you can choose whether you access the survey link during your Research Session
 - you can choose whether you provide consent for your information to be used as part of the research. If you do not tick the box providing consent, your assessment data will be destroyed as soon as is possible and will not be used for the current study
 - you can choose whether you submit your survey
- Once the research is complete, all participants will receive an information sheet that will provide them with findings of the research and if there are any resulting publications. It is expected that this will be available by December 2025/ January 2026.

Researcher contact details: If you have any questions or wish to find out more about the research, please don't hesitate to contact the researcher:

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Ethical approval: This research was granted ethical approval by HASS Departmental Ethics Committee, University of Strathclyde. If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee
University of Strathclyde, Graham Hills Building, 50 George Street, Glasgow G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141 548 3707
Email: hass-psh-ethics@strath.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. If you do not wish to participate, thank you for your time, attention and consideration so far. It is much appreciated.