



Changing life stories

A National Literacy Trust evaluation report

# News *wise*

## Evaluation report 2019-20

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## About NewsWise

The NewsWise programme was developed in 2018 by the Guardian Foundation, the National Literacy Trust and the PSHE Association, based on a shared mission to create a generation of news literate children in a digital age. The programme aims to empower children with the skills and knowledge to engage with and enjoy 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.



NewsWise provides a suite of free, high-quality and cross-curricular news literacy education resources, experiences and support for schools and families. These include newsroom-style pupil workshops, teacher training, lesson plans and online resources. Thanks to funding from Google.org, the programme is free for all settings teaching 9 to 11-year-olds across the UK, with a version for 7 to 8-year-olds piloted in 2019-20. Other adaptations this year include a significant expansion of the digital elements of the programme 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 UNESCO<sup>1</sup> and in 2020, a Nesta Democracy Pioneers award<sup>2</sup>.

## Executive summary

This report evaluates the impact of the second year of NewsWise, from May 2019 to July 2020<sup>3</sup>. During this time, the NewsWise team delivered workshops to **3,715** pupils in **75** 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, **894** teachers received face-to-face training, and a further **240** accessed webinars, helping schools to support and embed news literacy across the curriculum. In Year 2, the team also delivered family workshop events reaching **113** children and **85** adults. Finally, there were **27,324** downloads of curriculum-based lesson plans (units of work) and **3,735** free online resources (posters, case studies and tips) were downloaded.

As this report shows, pupils taking part in NewsWise had increased interest in the news, greater critical engagement and improved confidence when navigating news. For example, pupil surveys indicate that the percentage who say they are interested in news **more than doubled** (from 36.7% to 75.5%) following participation in the NewsWise workshop, and pupils were more likely to say they read, watch or listen to news even several weeks after taking part. At the end of the programme pupils are **twice as likely** to say they would check whether news came from a person or organisation they trust (29.0% vs. 61.6%) and while a third (33.3%) say they found it easy to tell whether or not a news story is trustworthy before taking part, 4 in 5 (82.8%) believe this afterwards. **98.8%** of teachers who took part in a NewsWise teacher training session said that they would recommend it to other schools, with 7 in 10 (71.6%) rating it as 'excellent'.

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

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

<sup>3</sup> For the evaluation of the first year, see Cappellini, C. and Picton, I. (2019).

## Summary of key findings

### Pupils have increased interest in, and active engagement with, the news

- The number of pupils interested in the news **more than doubled** following participation in the NewsWise workshop, with the percentage of pupils interested in the news rising from **36.7%** to **75.5%**, representing a 107% increase.
- The percentage of pupils who read, watch or listen to the news either daily or weekly increased from **59.5%** at the time of the workshop to **69.0%** in post-NewsWise surveys carried out several weeks later.

### 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 **37.5%** to **62.5%**. Similarly, the percentage of pupils who felt that news should be truthful increased from **37.8%** to **62.2%**.

### Pupils have improved news literacy behaviour

- At the end of the programme participating pupils were **twice as likely** to say that they would check whether news came from a person or organisation they trusted (increasing from **29.0%** to **61.6%**), while the percentage saying they would check whether a news story was reported by other news companies increased from **32.5%** to **59.1%**.

### Pupils are more confident navigating the news

- While just a third (**33.3%**) 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 more than 4 in 5 after both the workshop (**82.8%**) and programme as a whole (**81.8%**). This compares with a national average of **65.2%** of pupils who say they find it easy.

### Pupils have increased news literacy skills

- The percentage of pupils who were able to tell whether news stories in the news quiz were fake or real doubled. Before NewsWise, **32.7%** of pupils scored two points or more out of three on the news quiz. This percentage doubled after the programme, with **67.2%** of pupils scoring two points or more out of three.
- Conversely, the percentage of pupils who were unable to tell whether any of the news stories in the news quiz were fake or real decreased substantially. Before NewsWise, over a third (**34.5%**) scored 0 in the news quiz. However, after taking part only **6.9%** of pupils scored 0 on the quiz.

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

- **99.2%** rated the NewsWise training as 'excellent' (71.6%) or 'good' (27.6%). **100%** rated the webinar as 'excellent' (72%) or 'good' (28%).
- **97.8%** of teachers that took part in the face-to-face training agree their understanding of news literacy has improved and **89.9%** feel they are now more confident in supporting pupils' news literacy.

- **100%** of teachers agree that participating pupils have a better understanding of aspects of news, such as the difference between fact and opinion, and **97%** of teachers agree that pupils' skills in thinking critically about news stories have increased.

## Introduction

The rise of digital technology over the last decade has brought unprecedented change in how news is created and experienced, with both benefits and challenges for today's news consumers. The impact of misinformation has been a growing concern, leading to calls for children and young people's critical, media and news literacy skills to be strengthened to support a confident and informed navigation of the contemporary news environment.



While children and young people have grown up with the online world as a constant, convenient source of information, research shows that children may not necessarily have the knowledge and skills they need to assess the reliability of what they find there. For example, surveys conducted by the National Literacy Trust in 2017 found that not only did half of all pupils surveyed lack confidence in their ability to identify fake news but only 2% were able to correctly identify fake and real news stories presented as part of a quiz, with girls and those from more advantaged backgrounds performing better than their peers<sup>4</sup>.

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 peers<sup>5</sup>, suggesting that the targeted approach taken by NewsWise provides much-needed resources for children who can benefit the most from support in this area.



<sup>4</sup> National Literacy Trust (2018)

<sup>5</sup> Cappellini, C. and Picton, I., (2018)

## The NewsWise project model

The Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools, run by the APPG 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)<sup>6</sup>. These include 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 news<sup>7</sup>. The NewsWise programme responds directly to each of these findings, providing expert workshops, teacher training 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.

## Outputs

In the first year of the project (April 2018 – April 2019), NewsWise reached a total of 2,476 pupils and 540 teachers in 42 primary schools. In the second year (May 2019 – July 2020<sup>8</sup>) this increased to **3,715** pupils, **1,341** teachers and **75**<sup>9</sup> primary schools. Most workshops involved pupils aged 9 to 11, however, 4 schools ran 8 workshops to pilot new sessions aimed at pupils aged 7 to 8<sup>10</sup>. In Year 2, the team also delivered **4** family workshop events<sup>11</sup> reaching **85** adults and **113** children in areas of high literacy need, and a further **12** parents accessed a family-focused news literacy webinar. Since its inception, the NewsWise programme has reached **6,304** children, **117** schools, **1,881** teachers and **97** parents or carers across the UK.



The NewsWise team on stage at the Hay Festival 2019

<sup>6</sup> National Literacy Trust (2018)

<sup>7</sup> Picton, I. and Teravainen, A. (2017)

<sup>8</sup> The second ‘year’ was extended over four terms, to come into line with the academic year

<sup>9</sup> 62 schools reached in standard workshops, 13 through the Hay Festival. Note: Targets were approx. 8,000 children in 150 schools, impacted severely by school closures and UK lockdown in March 2020 (see ‘Response to COVID-19 pandemic’).

<sup>10</sup> Pilot sessions reached 231 pupils (numbers of schools, workshops and pupils are included in overall figures).

<sup>11</sup> Through National Literacy Trust Hubs in Bradford, Middlesbrough and Stoke-on-Trent, and the Hay Festival

In both years, schools were invited to take part in the NewsWise programme based on their level of need and, in addition to workshops and resources, teachers received expert training and access to an online practitioner network. To ensure the project was delivered in schools with the greatest need of support, strict selection criteria were developed. 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 vulnerability (see e.g. National Literacy Trust and Experian, 2017)
- Be located in an area that is typically under-represented in the mainstream media

The average percentage of pupils eligible for FSM across the 117 primary schools that participated in NewsWise was 27.2%, well above the national average of 17.3%<sup>12</sup>. **Figure 1** shows the distribution of schools visited. NewsWise was delivered in primary schools in every country in the UK and achieved a diverse geographical spread.

**Figure 1: NewsWise reach in 2019-20**



Thanks to funding from Google.org, digital NewsWise resources such as posters, tips and curriculum-based lesson plans (units of work) are available for 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, **3,735** free online resources have been downloaded, and **27,324** curriculum-based lesson plans (units of work). This is significantly higher than the 703 units of work downloaded in Year 1, reflecting a successful change in the presentation of these resources (through a dedicated webpage<sup>13</sup>) and an increase in the number and range of resources available to download.

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education (2020)

<sup>13</sup> A 'Unit of work front': <https://www.theguardian.com/newswise-unit-of-work>

## A note on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

It was necessary to postpone all face-to-face NewsWise events (such as workshops, teacher training and family events) from 16 March 2020, when the UK government announced school closures and a UK-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The NewsWise team quickly adapted, providing a variety of digital news literacy resources to support schools with remote learning and families who were home educating their children.

These included a Family Pack (promoted via the NewsWise website, the National Literacy Trust's Family Zone<sup>14</sup> website and the PSHE Association's Home Learning page<sup>15</sup>) and resources to support children's wellbeing developed in collaboration with the PSHE Association. Teacher training sessions were transformed into a series of webinars and a parent webinar was designed to support families. In addition, a virtual NewsWise workshop was piloted, and will be available from September 2020 for schools who were unable to take part in workshops during the lockdown, before being offered more widely to other UK schools that meet demographic targets (such as above average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals). Finally, The Happy News Project<sup>16</sup> was designed and promoted to encourage positive interaction with the news. The NewsWise resources will continue to be free for all primary schools in the UK, extending the reach of the project into communities where its impact is most needed.

## Evaluation methodology

### NewsWise objectives

Objectives for the NewsWise programme were established early in the programme's development, when it was determined that NewsWise would aim 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**
  - Increased ability and confidence to create and share their own news

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<sup>14</sup> <https://literacytrust.org.uk/family-zone/>

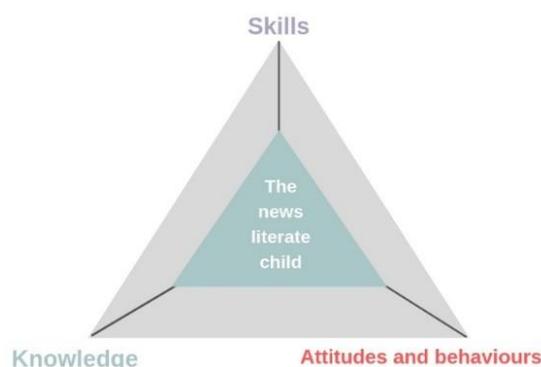
<sup>15</sup> <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/content/home-learning-resources>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/newswise/2020/jul/13/happy-news-project-reports>

Based on the *Read On. Get On. (ROGO) Index*<sup>17</sup>, 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**



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.

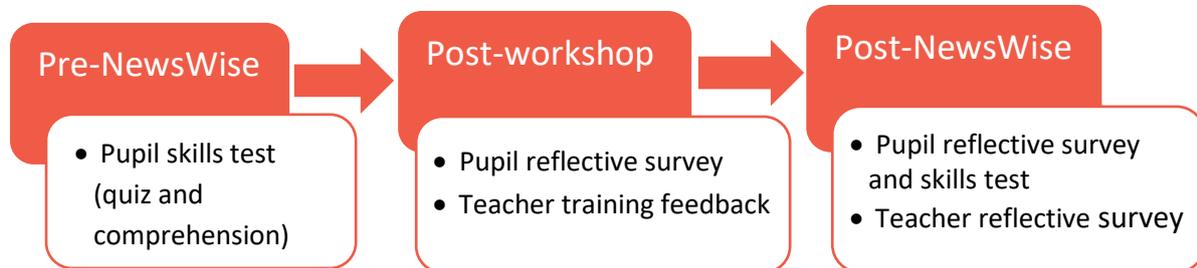
**Figure 3: The news literate child**

<p><b>KNOWLEDGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I understand the role of the news media</li> <li>• I know how news is produced by media companies</li> <li>• I know what fake news is, why it is produced and how it can be a problem</li> <li>• I know what sources I can trust/where to get trustworthy news from</li> <li>• I know news reports should be: truthful, fair, balanced, interesting</li> <li>• I know the features of a news report (structure, language, layout)</li> </ul>		<p><b>ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS</b></p> <p>I am...engaged, curious, empowered, sceptical, fair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I stop to question a news story and check the facts before sharing it</li> <li>• I stop to question the trustworthiness of a source</li> <li>• I am confident discussing news stories at home and at school</li> <li>• I get news and information from a broad range of sources</li> <li>• I look for different points of view within news stories</li> <li>• I am curious about what is happening in the world</li> <li>• I enjoy reading/watching/listening to/discussing news</li> <li>• I listen to and respect other people’s opinions</li> <li>• I value news/ I think news is important</li> <li>• I am motivated to report news stories that are important to me</li> </ul>
<p><b>SKILLS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can ask questions and make checks when investigating whether or not a story is real</li> <li>• I can tell the difference between fact and opinion (rumour and speculation)</li> <li>• I can evaluate whether a news report is truthful, fair and balanced</li> <li>• I can summarise the main ideas within a news story (using 5Ws)</li> <li>• I can identify newsworthy, safe and responsible stories to tell</li> <li>• I can research information for a news story</li> <li>• I can use the language, layout and structural features of a news report</li> <li>• I can use my voice to report a story in a truthful, interesting, fair and balanced way</li> <li>• I can edit my writing using the skills of a subeditor</li> </ul>		

<sup>17</sup> <https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/read-on-get-on/rogo-index/>

To evaluate outcomes reached through workshops and resources, changes in news literacy were measured through three perception points: child self-perception, teacher perception and skills testing (see **Figure 4**).

**Figure 4: Evaluation time points**



Affective and behavioural elements were evaluated through survey questions designed to explore awareness of topics such as how news is created, positive news literacy behaviours (such as checking sources) and self-reported confidence to question the news. Skills were evaluated through a short news quiz and narrative comprehension test (see note below). Based on learning from Year 1, two significant changes were made to the programme's evaluation methodology in Year 2:

- Alongside a news quiz comprising three examples of real and fake news, a short **narrative news story** with comprehension questions was introduced at pre and post-testing points. This was informed by validated approaches to measuring children's news literacy (see Hobbs and Frost 2003; 2017) and designed to measure children's understanding of key elements of a news article (such as the 'Five Ws') in more depth, but without adding too onerous a time burden to participating children and schools.
- The 'pre-post' pupil survey approach used in Year 1 was updated with a **'post-reflective' model** in Year 2, informed both by the evidence base<sup>18</sup> and extensive testing with similar projects evaluated by the research team. Reflective post-tests have multiple benefits; for example, they have been found to more closely match the expert judgement of participant knowledge and skills compared to pre-survey ratings; they reduce the possibility of response shift bias and they prevent the loss of valuable data due to attrition between pre and post-survey points.

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



<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Davis (2003), Klatt and Taylor-Powell (2005), Lam & Bengo (2003), Lamb (2005), Pratt et al., (2000), Rockwell & Kohn (1989)

## Sample

Pupil pre-NewsWise survey responses were received from **2,439** pupils, an acceptable response rate in relation to 3,715 overall workshop participants (65.7%). Pupil post-workshop responses were received from **1,130** pupils. However, 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 disappointing, with only **372** surveys received (around 10% of all participants). This affected the number of responses that could be matched at post-workshop and post-programme points. For this reason, the following analysis of attitudinal and behavioural change will be based on cohort level data, while the skills test sample will focus on the **57** pupils who could be matched through unique identifiers.

With regard to adults, **258** of a possible **894** face-to-face teacher training feedback forms were completed (28.9%, a slight increase on Year 1) and a further **125** webinar feedback forms out of a possible 240 (52.1%). However, only **36** post-NewsWise teacher surveys were received, despite being incentivised with a draw for a voucher of their choice. Feedback from family workshops, online resources and parent webinars was also more limited, reflecting the more informal and fun nature of these sessions, and lower emphasis on formal evaluation (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Evaluation samples for NewsWise**

	Time point and subject of survey	Purpose	Number completed
Pupil	Pre-NewsWise quiz and comprehension test	To establish a baseline, allowing comparison with post-NewsWise pupil quiz and test	2,439 (57 matched)
	Post-workshop reflective survey	To evaluate short-term changes (i.e. over the course of the workshop) in pupils' news literacy	1,130
	Post-NewsWise survey, quiz and comprehension test	To evaluate longer-term changes (i.e. after the unit of work) and compare with pre-NewsWise quiz and test	372
Teacher	Post-teacher training	To evaluate feedback from face-to-face teacher training sessions	258
	Post-teacher webinar	To evaluate feedback from teacher webinar sessions	125
	Post-NewsWise	To evaluate longer-term changes (i.e. after the unit of work) in pupils' news literacy	36
	Post-NewsWise interview	To further evaluate longer-term changes in pupils' news literacy	4
Family	Family workshop survey	To evaluate feedback from face-to-face workshops with families	15

	Family pack survey	To evaluate feedback from free online resources provided during lockdown	18
	Parent webinar feedback	To evaluate feedback from parent webinar sessions	3

## Reflections and recommendations on evaluation methodology

School closures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic affected not only programme delivery, but also the evaluation process, in particular the opportunity to recruit schools to act as a control for the news quiz and comprehension test; to arrange focus group discussions in schools that had piloted workshops for younger pupils; and to conduct longitudinal teacher interviews. We plan to find appropriate opportunities in the new academic year to address some of these deficiencies in data collection and will update this report accordingly in due course.

### Overview

As indicated in the evaluation methodology section, pupils' news literacy attitudes and behaviours were captured through surveys at two time points: after taking part in the NewsWise workshop (the 'post-workshop' reflective survey) and after some or all of the unit of work had been completed (the 'post-NewsWise' reflective survey). In each survey, some questions were asked about attitudes and behaviours at the point of taking the survey, and prior to taking part in NewsWise. For example, questions included: "How interested are you in news?" and "Thinking back to before you took part in NewsWise, how interested were you in news then?" The answer to the second question was treated as a 'pre' or 'baseline' response.

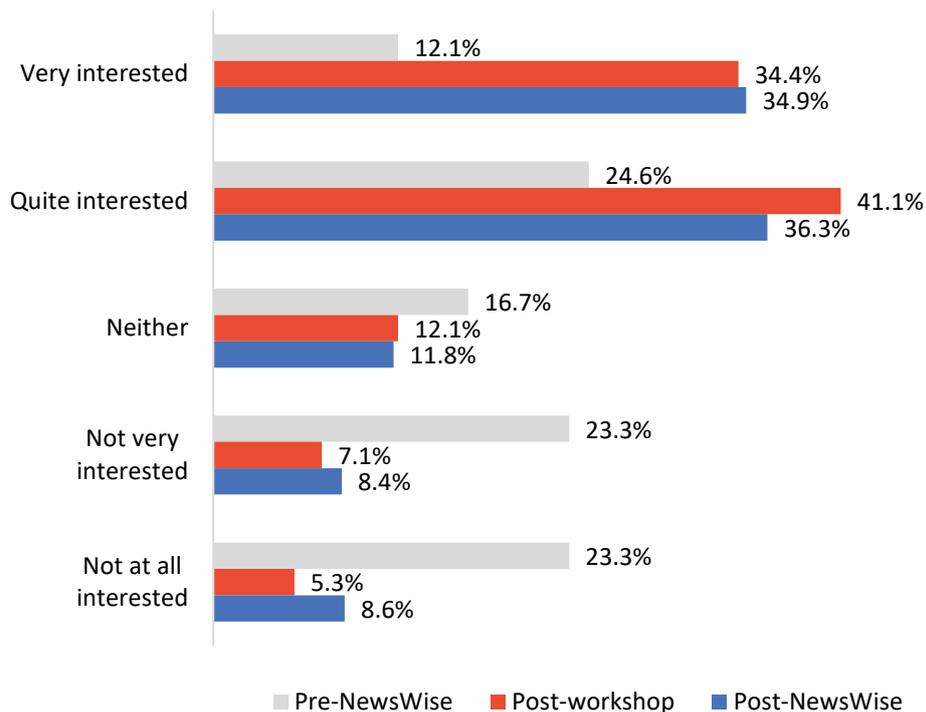
The survey results show that, across a variety of indicators, pupils' news literacy attitudes, behaviour and confidence improved after taking part in the NewsWise workshop, and in many cases there is an additional improvement following the completion of the unit of work. This demonstrates that the workshop is an effective tool to improve news literacy, and that the unit of work successfully furthers and consolidates learning.



## Key finding 1: Pupils have increased interest in, and active engagement with, the news

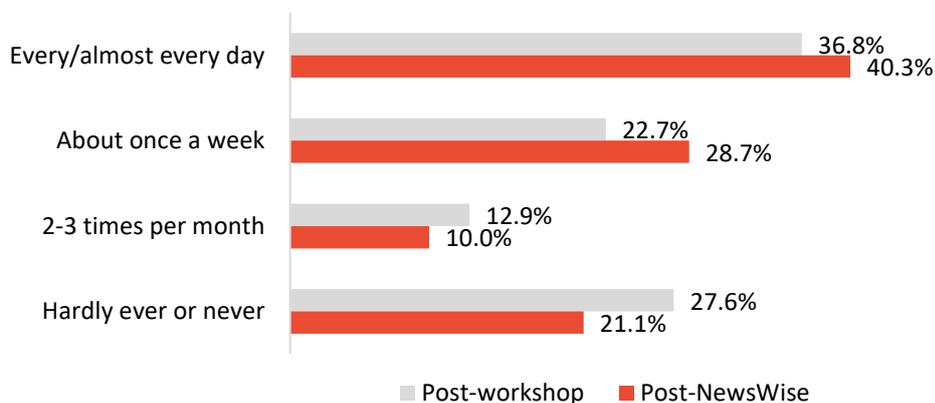
One of the most prominent findings from pupil surveys is that the NewsWise workshop is particularly effective in increasing pupils' engagement with news (see **Figure 6**). Indeed, the number of pupils who say that they are 'very interested' or 'quite interested' in news increased after the workshop by 107%, from 36.7% to 75.5%. This was sustained in post-NewsWise surveys, which indicated that 71.2% of pupils are now interested in news.

**Figure 6: Pupil responses to the question 'How interested are you in news?'**



Pupils were also asked how often they read, watch or listen to the news at the post-workshop and post-NewsWise survey time points. The percentage of pupils who engaged with the news either daily or weekly increased from 59.5% to 69.0% over this time (see **Figure 7**).

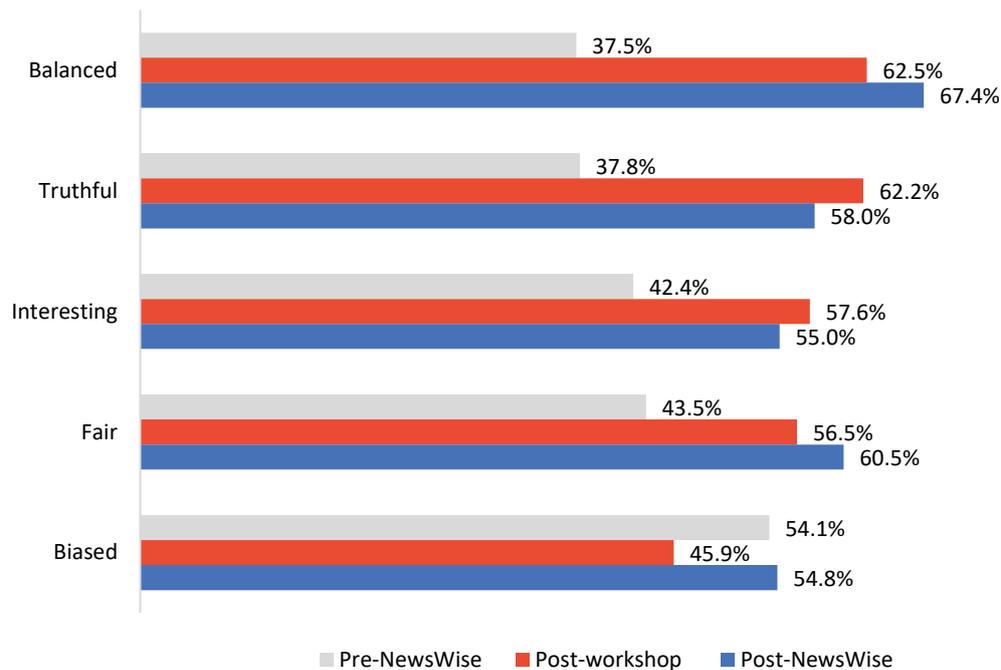
**Figure 7: Pupil responses to the question 'How often do you read, watch or listen to the news?'**



## Key finding 2: 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, truthful and fair picture (see **Figure 8**).

**Figure 8: Pupils' understanding of what news should be**



Increases before and after taking part in a NewsWise workshop were dramatic. For example, there was a **67%** increase in the number of pupils who believed news stories should be balanced (increasing from 37.5% to 62.5%), and a **65%** increase in those who felt they should be truthful (increasing from 37.8% to 62.2%). Again, learning was broadly sustained or indeed increased, between the post-workshop and the later post-programme surveys. This indicates that the workshop was very effective at increasing the critical engagement of pupils, and that the unit of work furthered their understanding of what news should be.

However (and somewhat echoing findings from Year 1 of the programme), the percentage who felt news should be biased increased (albeit very marginally) between the beginning and the end of the programme. This suggests that the programme was less successful in improving pupils' understanding of this concept in relation to news, particularly over the longer term.

**Truthful**  
Be honest. Check the facts are accurate. Don't guess. Don't assume. Don't make things up!

---

**Fair**  
Treat everyone equally and with respect. Only report what you need to tell your story. Don't bully or make fun of people. Treat people in the way you would like to be treated.

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**Balanced**  
Make sure all sides of the story are represented. Include all relevant viewpoints (even if you disagree with them!).

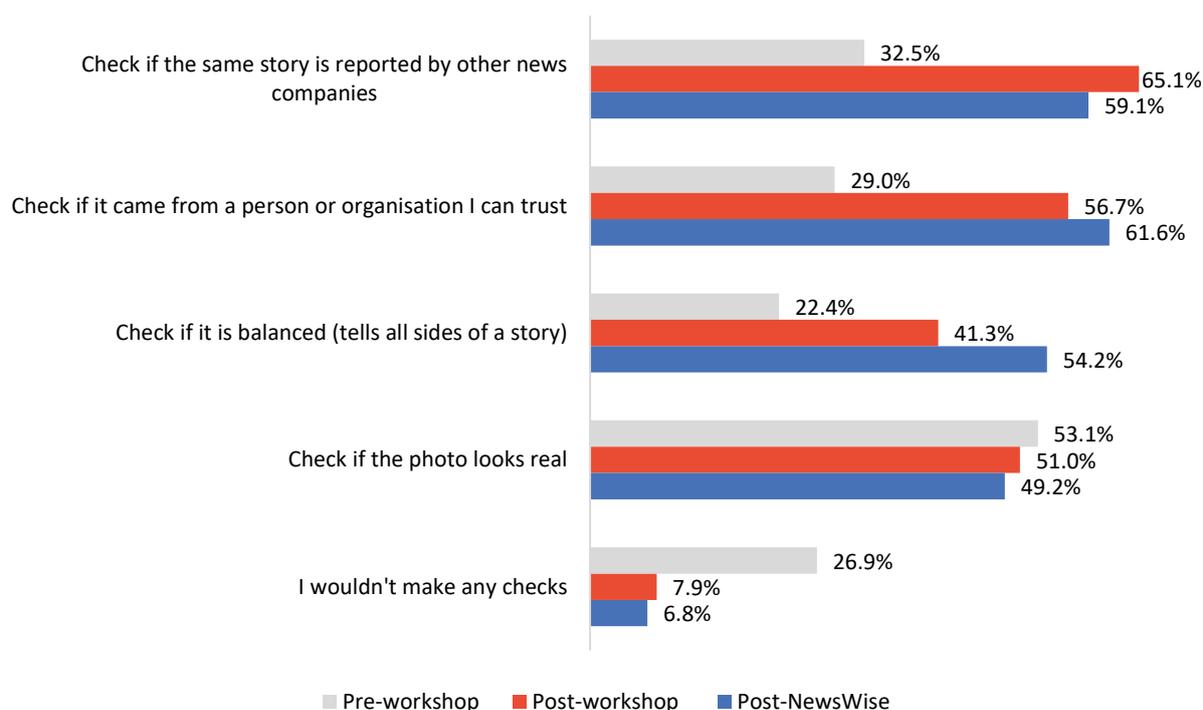
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**Interesting**  
Consider why stories are important and why your audience would want to hear them. Ask lots of questions to find out new facts and details.

### Key finding 3: 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 are more likely to do a range of checks to verify news having taken part in NewsWise (see **Figure 15**).

**Figure 15: What pupils say they do to check whether a news story is trustworthy**



For example, while less than a third (32.5%) of pupils would check whether a story was reported by other news companies before taking part in NewsWise, this doubled to just under two-thirds (65.1%) after the workshops, and remained relatively steady at 3 in 5 (59.1%) at the end of the programme. A similarly dramatic jump is seen in relation to checking a news story came from a person or organisation children could trust, however this was seen to increase further (from 56.7% to 61.6%) between the post-workshop and the post-NewsWise survey points.

This pattern was echoed again in relation to checking whether a news item told all sides of a story. The percentage of pupils who say they would do this almost doubled (from 22.4% to 41.3%) between the pre-NewsWise and post-workshop survey points, but increased to 54.2% at the end of the programme, suggesting that the unit of work not only **sustained, but increased** learning about using trusted sources and looking for signs of balanced reporting when evaluating news. This may also suggest that a light touch intervention is effective with the majority of the cohort, but a more intensive programme would increase the news literacy skills of those pupils who most need support.

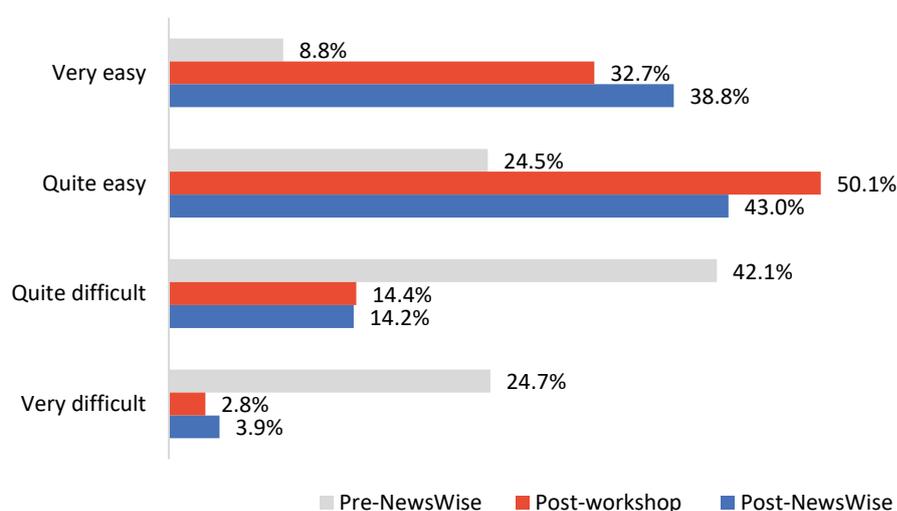
Interestingly, the percentage of pupils who would check whether a photo looked real decreased very marginally after the initial workshop, and again at the end of the programme,

with only about half of pupils saying they would perform this check when evaluating a news story. It may be worth considering strengthening the visual literacy elements of the programme to increase the percentage of pupils including this check, particularly in an age in which developments in technology may increase the likelihood of image manipulation being used to support some forms of misinformation (see e.g. Shen et al., 2019).

## Key finding 4: Pupils are more confident navigating the news

We know that confidence is an issue for pupils as, in the pre-survey, only a third (33.3%) of pupils said they find it ‘quite easy’ or ‘very easy’ to tell whether or not a piece of news is true (see **Figure 16**).

**Figure 16: 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 to 82.8%, and, importantly, this remained at a similar level (81.1%) at the post-NewsWise survey point. Conversely, less than 1 in 5 (17.2%) pupils found it ‘very difficult’ or ‘quite difficult’ to tell whether a news story is trustworthy, decreasing from 66.8% pre-NewsWise and representing a 74% decrease in the number of under-confident pupils.

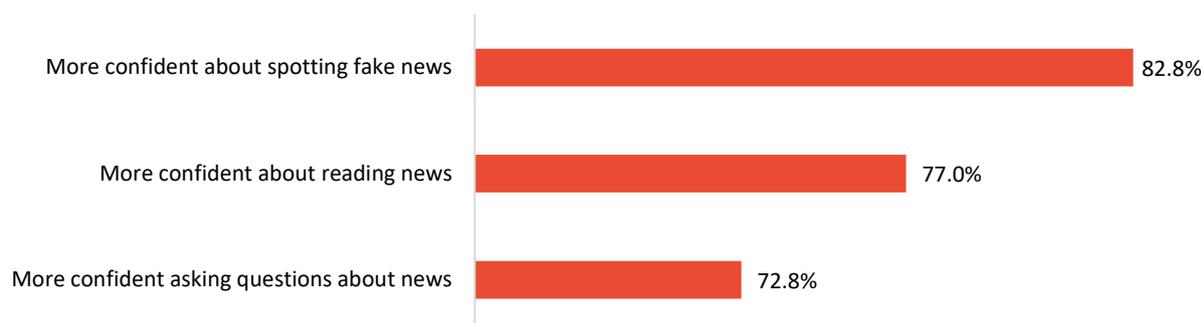
Data from the National Literacy Trust’s Annual Literacy Survey 2020 indicate that NewsWise is helping to raise children’s confidence in their news literacy skills above the national average<sup>19</sup>. 82.8% of NewsWise participants say that they find it easy to tell whether a news story is trustworthy, compared with just 65.2% of same-age pupils across the UK.

Additional questions were asked to explore which areas pupils’ confidence had most increased following the workshop and programme. Post-workshop surveys indicate that more than 4 in 5 participants (82.8%) feel more confident about spotting fake news, more than

<sup>19</sup> Survey reached 58,346 respondents aged 8 to 18 in early 2020, comparison made with upper KS2 pupils

three-quarters (77.0%) are more confident when it comes to reading news and 7 in 10 are more confident asking questions about news (see **Figure 17**).

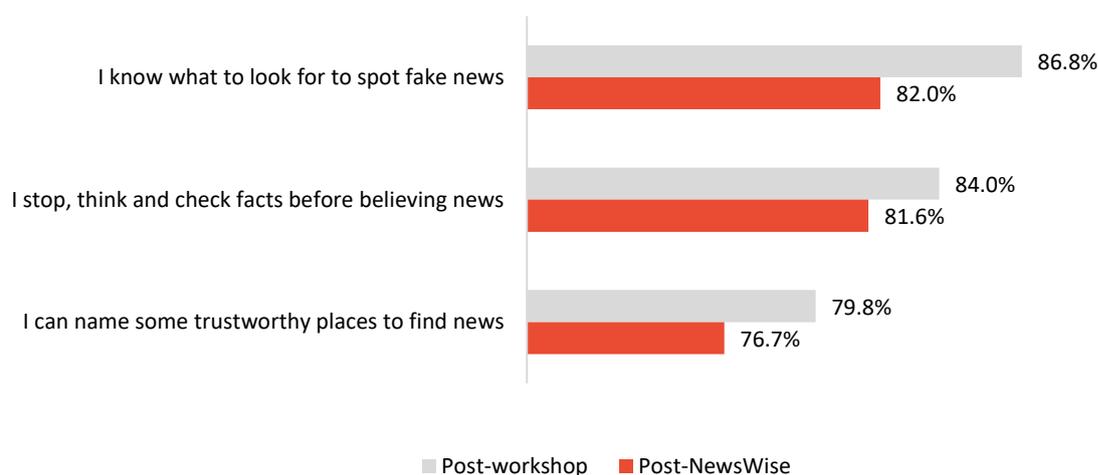
**Figure 17: Pupils’ agreement with news literacy statements**



In addition, in the post-NewsWise survey, pupils were asked questions about sharing news, and reporting their own news stories that were not relevant at post-workshop stage, but provided additional insight into confidence at the end of the NewsWise programme. Responses show that two-thirds (67.5%) of children are more confident sharing news stories and 3 in 5 (58.9%) are more confident reporting their own news stories.

In Year 2 of the NewsWise programme, new statements relating to **children’s scepticism and reasoning skills** were inserted into both the pupil and teacher surveys. These were developed in consultation with others working in this space and with reference to Skillsbuilder<sup>20</sup> questions on scepticism. Responses to post-workshop and post-programme surveys indicated 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 18**).

**Figure 18: Pupils’ agreement with news literacy statements**



It is perhaps also worth mentioning that, alongside the learning outcomes outlined above, more than **8 in 10** pupils (83.9%) reported enjoying the NewsWise workshop, with 53.1%

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/>

saying it was ‘very good’ and 30.8% saying it was ‘good’. Pupils enjoyed working in teams and the public speaking and listening opportunities offered by the workshop:

“I liked how it brought us all [together] as one team and we had to work together which was amazing and I really liked it I would like them to come back in.”

“It was inspiring ...to get to speak in front of people you wouldn’t normally, and not be scared or nervous.”

“I liked being the team leader and getting to listen to other groups’ opinions about the news.”

Other comments suggested that making their own news was an empowering and authentic experience and challenged them to develop their writing skills:

“Making the news ourselves.”

“I liked how we got to host our own News Show and how we got to learn a true story about something that was actually produced on the news.”

“I have enjoyed sharing stories with people in my news reports and I have enjoyed taking my time to develop the structure of the report and to learn more about my community. I think NewsWise has encouraged me to enjoy the news more and to be able to understand the news.”

“I tried to write my news report at a high standard because sometimes I read newspapers on the bus or train. I liked the fact that you have to be fair because if you’re not ...it will only be one person’s point of view.”

Finally, two schools had in-person journalist Q&A sessions pre-lockdown, and two virtual sessions, in which volunteer journalists visited classes taking part in the NewsWise programme to speak about their roles and answer questions from the children about what it is like to be a journalist, as well as offer expert advice on the news reports that children were producing. Some pupils were also inspired by this:

“I thought the visit from the reporter was amazing because she was honest but also very interesting.”

“It has given me an idea for my future career in later life ... now I’m very interested.”

## **Key finding 5: Pupils showed increased news literacy skills**

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.

The fake news test was complemented by a comprehension test, which asked pupils to read a news article and answer five multiple choice questions on the 'Five Ws' (see **Figure 19**). Studies have shown that testing pupils on their comprehension skills using this method gives insight into their news and media literacy skills<sup>21</sup>.

**Figure 19: The Five Ws**



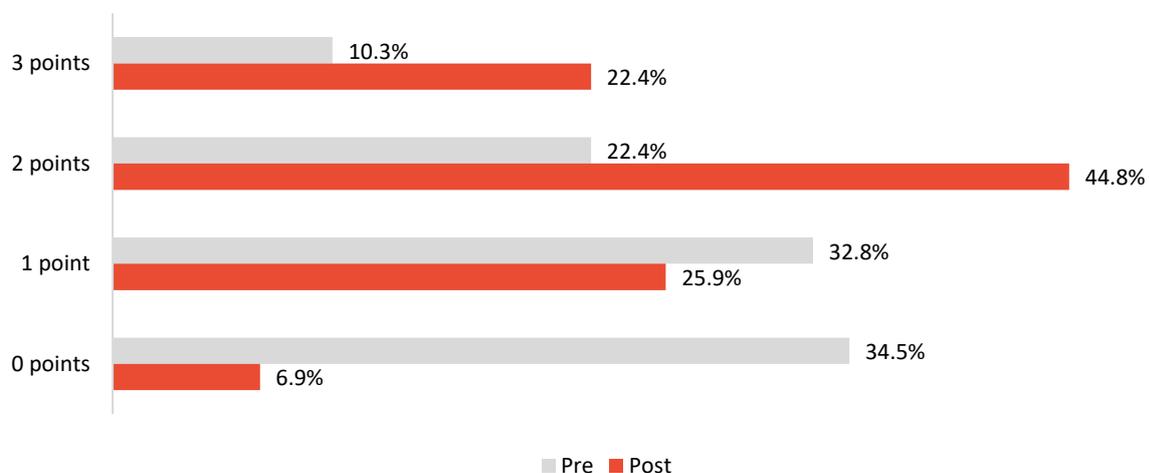
### Real or fake news quiz

Before and after taking part in NewsWise, pupils were asked to look at three news articles (a mix of real and fake news) and judge whether these were real or fake.

Pupils are significantly better at spotting fake news at the end of NewsWise than they were before. As shown in **Figure 20**, the percentage of pupils who were able to tell whether news stories in the news quiz were fake or real doubled, with 32.7% of pupils scoring two points or more out of three on the news quiz at the beginning and 67.2% of pupils scoring two points or more out of three after NewsWise.

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 substantially. Before NewsWise, over a third (34.5%) scored 0 in the news quiz. However, after taking part 6.9% of pupils scored 0 on the quiz.

**Figure 20: Changes in pupils' performance on the real or fake news quiz**

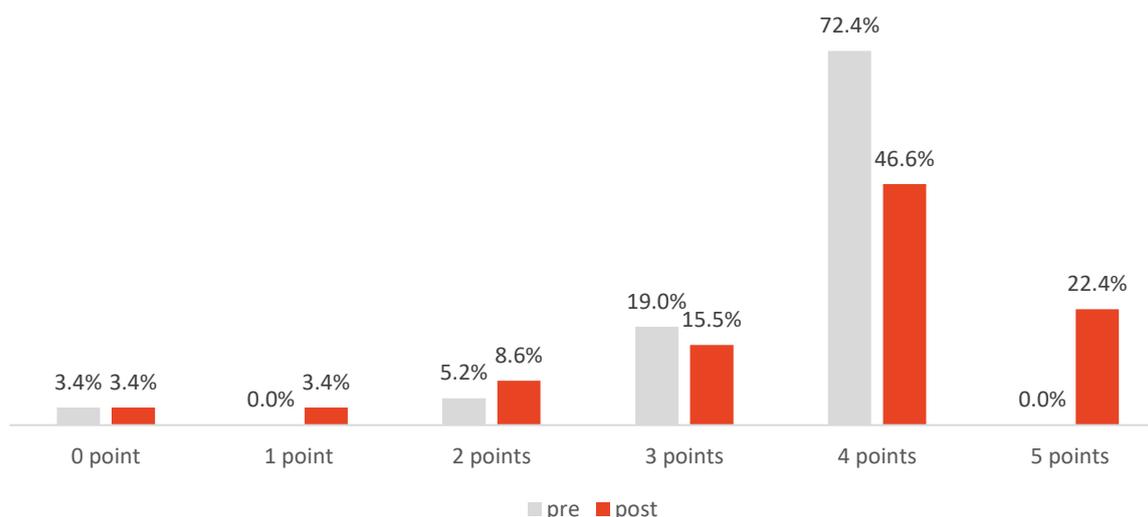


<sup>21</sup> Hobbs R. (2003). *Measuring the Acquisition of Media-Literacy Skills*. Reading Research Quarterly.

## Comprehension test

As shown in **Figure 21**, no pupil (0%) was able to answer all the five questions correctly before taking part in NewsWise. However, 1 in 5 (22.4%) were able to identify all the Five Ws correctly after having taken part in the programme. Although this finding is very promising, the difference in comprehension score over time was not statistically significant.

**Figure 21: Changes in pupils' performance on the comprehension tests**



## Teachers' perspectives on the NewsWise programme

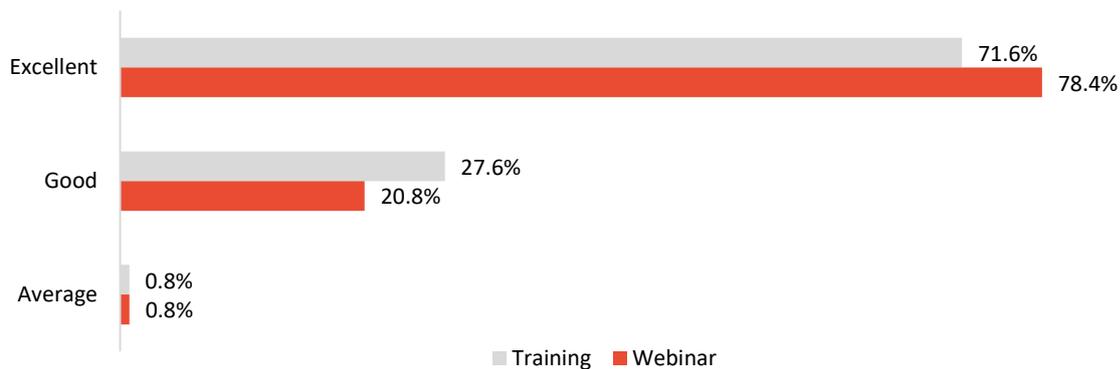
Teachers may be involved in the project through several avenues: through their school or class taking part in a NewsWise workshop delivered by the NewsWise team; through attending a face-to-face or remote teacher training session; by running the unit of work with their pupils; or by downloading online resources. In addition, 60 BEd. and PGCE students from the University of Wolverhampton took part in the training and 24 final-year Initial Teacher Training students from the University of Worcester took part in both the training and pupil workshops.

Three surveys were developed to capture teachers' feedback on the programme. The **post-teacher training survey** included questions about the impact of the training on their knowledge and confidence about supporting news literacy and their professional perception of the impact of the workshop on pupils. A version of this survey was also used to capture feedback on **remote teacher training** sessions, delivered through a series of webinars following school closures in March 2020. 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.

## 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. As shown in **Figure 22**, almost all teachers (**99.2%**) rated the NewsWise face-to-face teacher training as 'excellent' or 'good', and interestingly, 99.2% of teachers also rated the online training webinar as 'excellent' or 'good', suggesting that online training was considered as good as, if not slightly better than, the face-to-face version.

**Figure 22: How would you rate the NewsWise face-to-face training or webinar overall?**



Reflecting this, **almost all** teachers (**98.8%** face-to-face, **99.2%** webinar) say they **would recommend** the NewsWise training to other schools. Furthermore, almost all (98.1% face-to-face, 98.4% webinar) found the content of the session relevant to the curriculum, and agreed that they would integrate the learning into their future teaching practice (94.2% face-to-face, 100% webinar). Teachers also feel that the NewsWise training, whether delivered face-to-face or online, contributed substantially to their professional development. **95.3%** believed this of the face-to-face training (42.0% 'very much', 53.3% 'quite a lot', 4.7% 'not very much') and **99.2%** in relation to the webinar (51.2% 'very much' 28.0% 'quite a lot' and 0.8% 'not very much').

In addition, **97.8%** of teachers that took part in the face-to-face training agree their understanding of news literacy has improved (50.7% 'strongly agree' and 47.1% 'agree') and **89.9%** feel they are now more confident in supporting pupils' news literacy (41.6% 'very confident', 48.2% 'fairly confident' and 10.1% 'slightly confident'). Similarly, in post-NewsWise surveys, **all** teachers agree that they now feel more confident teaching news literacy (58.8% 'strongly agree' and 41.2% 'agree') and all agree that their understanding of news literacy has improved (51.4% 'strongly agree' and 48.6% 'agree').

Teachers were also very positive about the quality of the NewsWise pupil workshop, with 91.3% rating it 'excellent' and 8.7% as 'good'. Feedback on the NewsWise unit of work was significantly more limited; however, of 19 teachers that completed a post survey that indicated they had shared some or all of the unit of work with their class, 15 rated it as 'excellent', 3 as 'good' and 1 as 'fairly good'. Comments included:

“Brilliant! Wish we could have the workshop every year!”

“Thoroughly enjoyed the class workshop and the teachers’ training day. Very useful, excellent resources and delivery by excellent knowledgeable staff.”



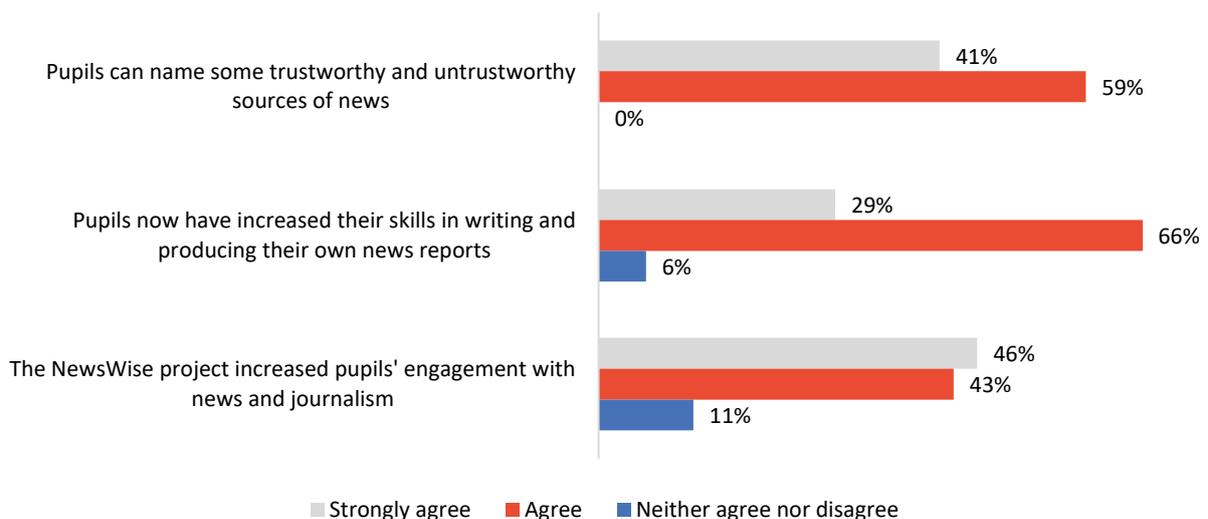
### Teachers report an increase in pupils’ news literacy skills

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

- **100%** of teachers agree or strongly agree that participating pupils have a better understanding of aspects of news, such as the difference between fact and opinion
- **97%** of teachers agree that pupils’ skills in thinking critically about news stories have increased
- **97%** of teachers noticed increased confidence when thinking critically about news
- **94%** say pupils are more likely to use more than one source to check facts

Regarding improvement in specific news literacy skills in their pupils, all teachers agree or strongly agree that pupils are able to name some trustworthy and untrustworthy sources of news, and almost all (95%) 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 23**).

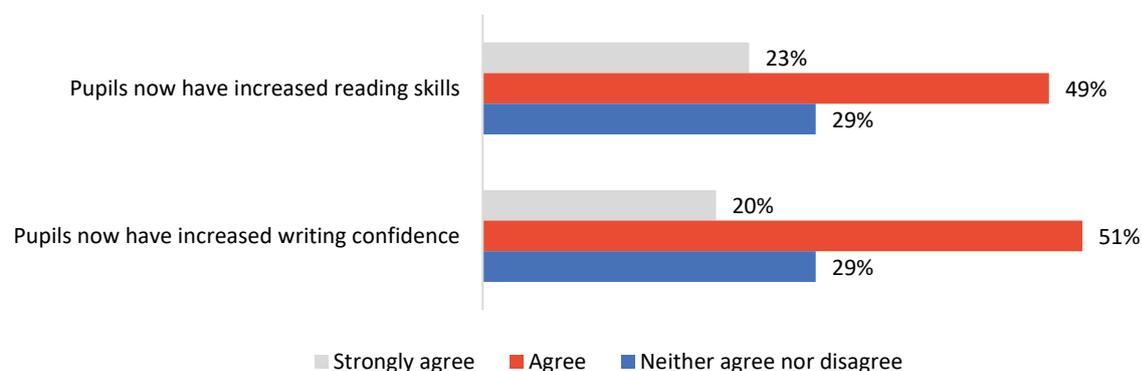
**Figure 23: Impact of NewsWise on pupils’ news literacy knowledge, skills and engagement**



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree

Following positive comments about the impact of NewsWise on pupils' **wider literacy skills and confidence** in the first year of the programme, teachers were again asked about this in Year 2. Surveys indicated that 7 in 10 teachers agree that pupils have increased reading skills (72%) and writing confidence (71%) (see **Figure 24**).

**Figure 24: Teachers' perceptions of the impact of NewsWise on pupils' wider literacy skills and confidence**



Teachers were also 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.

### 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:

“H. ...finds it very difficult to speak in front of his peers due to issues with his confidence. However, as his role was editor, he really lived up to his role and was able to speak in front of his whole class which was amazing to see!”

“B. does not often share his views in class and finds processing information difficult. He was a super reporter and found his role very natural.”

### Greater engagement in reading and writing

The positive impact of reading and writing about real-world, local topics on less keen writers was mentioned by several teachers:

“C. loved the initial first session and it really got her hooked with reading and becoming more understanding of fake news and reliable sources. She didn't really understand this before so it has certainly helped her moving forwards.”

“One of my Y6 reluctant writers has come on in leaps and bounds. He was very vocal the following day about the workshop and with regard to his writing, when we did a newspaper report the following term, he recalled so much about fact and opinion and shared lots with us and his keenness to write independently has increased two-fold. Thank you.”

“One pupil enjoyed ...planning an article about the local area and said it was the best lesson he ever had in Literacy. This pupil struggled to engage in literacy topics in the past, but really enjoyed the NewsWise project.”

Some noted that the oracy elements of the project influenced children’s writing skills:

“A. really came to life when acting out the news broadcast – she shone in the role of interviewer, using just the right tone and vocabulary. Her understanding of what was needed then carried over into her writing.”

### **Increased critical awareness**

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

“It was amazing to see YK really engaged and critically thinking about information by checking validity.”

“N and T, both boys. The differences found reading the slightly different news about the same event opened their minds and [they] are now aware they must check different newspapers or platforms to have a greater picture.”

“What became most noticeable was pupils’ critical examination of any future reports. A few weeks later we were learning [about] Fairtrade and they took skills learnt from the NewsWise workshop and applied them to the report.”

### **Engaging reluctant and vulnerable pupils with learning**

Another strong theme was that sessions could often be seen to engage the most reluctant students with learning, and several teachers noted students who face extra learning challenges found this programme a great way to feel involved, and excel, in group tasks:

“One child rarely speaks in front of the class and is usually a reluctant participant in group settings, but he was able to stand up in front of the class and do his part. This was a massive achievement for him.”

“A pupil who is typically very quiet and sometimes reluctant to offer her opinion developed such a love for what she was doing that she felt inspired enough to say that she now wants to become a journalist.”

“I have a number of autistic children in my class. I thought that E., who is one of my autistic children, flourished during the session, and self-esteem and confidence-wise she got a lot from playing the role of editor in her group.”

“During the workshop one girl (who is entitled to free school meals and has had intervention from social services in her family) couldn’t believe that some of the stories / headlines were fake but really started engaging with this idea. She quickly identified some of the language suggesting it was fake when her group investigated the story further.”

Although there were limited comments on the impact of visits from journalists, these tended to be very positive:

*“The visit hooked the children in. They engaged straight away and it added value to the learning. They met someone 'important/influential' which gave the programme more gravitas than a teacher simply delivering the lesson.”*

*“It will be something our children remember forever, not much happens up our neck of the woods and they don't see a range of aspirational careers like this, so a huge thank you on their behalf.”*

## 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. A representative interview transcript is provided below, and indicates a number of unintended outcomes were visible in some pupils:

### **“It has developed their maturity and their world view”**

*“I was with my class when they took part in the NewsWise workshop and also took part in the teacher training session, and later used the programme booklet. I really enjoyed it and want to take it into my practice in the future. I think it was really good for children to learn about the concept of different sources, how we know what a valuable source is and why we can't just make things up. Playing clips of real people doing things (such as the girl selling lemonade) was also good for engaging the children, and something we've 'stolen' for other purposes in school since. For example, I showed clips of the main politicians speaking around the time of the election. Having the iPads to work on does seem to get the children's interest, editing and so on – it was really well-paced and kept their attention. For example, when 'breaking news' came in they would say 'Oh, this changes the story', but they weren't overloaded, it was fun.*

*Since the workshop, I've noticed that children have altered their language – they used to say 'That's fake news!' all the time, but they don't do this in the same way – they are a bit more savvy and know to look at the sources. Softer touch outcomes include a greater interest in the news – as a school, we have always had First News and Newsround, but they can now ask 'Is this biased?' or recognise different opinions – they are more 'news fluent'. For example, when we looked at how different newspapers presented the election candidates, they know that wasn't fake, but they were quite shocked at the bias, and this led to some critical discussion.*

*As a school we work hard on raising the children's aspirations, and Year 5 have also visited the Guardian Newsroom, so some of them now see journalism as a potential job. We also work on developing character and making children ready for what can feel like a big, confusing world, sometimes with fake news and panic. There have also been wider outcomes in this direction too – they are beginning to see their role as a big part of that world, it has developed their maturity and their world view.”*

Teacher, Enfield

## Family workshop, resources and parent webinar feedback

The family element of the NewsWise programme was developed considerably in Year 2, with a series of family workshops planned. A total of four family workshop events were held, three in National Literacy Trust Hub areas of high literacy need (Bradford, Stoke-on-Trent and Middlesbrough) and one at the Hay Festival in Wales.



Children and families enjoy a family workshop event in Stoke-On-Trent

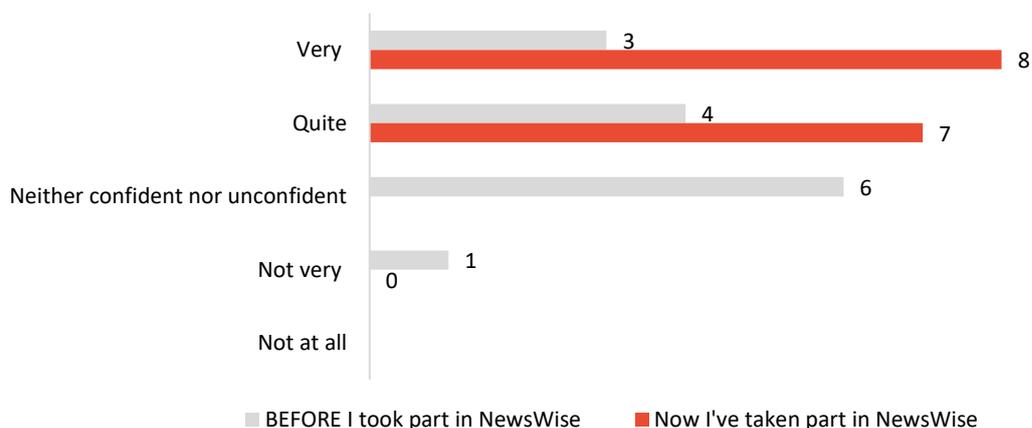
85 adults and 113 children took part in these events, and 15 feedback forms were received. 13 respondents rated the session 'very good', 1 'good' and 1 'OK'. Positive comments included:

*"Information was provided in a fun and engaging way for the kids, easy for them to follow too."*

*"I think it was a brilliant idea, it's good to teach children what to look out for especially now there is more technology and a lot of things are questionable in this day and age. Hopefully next time my son will think first before believing something which could not be true."*

Most families reported greater confidence in supporting their children's news literacy as a result of the workshop (see **Figure 25**).

**Figure 25: How confident do you feel about helping your child to spot fake news?**



There was also some uplift in relation to expressed interest in engaging with the news in the future, with 13 families agreeing (3 ‘strongly agree’, 10 ‘agree’) with the statement that they will now “watch, listen to or read news more as a family” and 14 agreeing (3 ‘strongly agree’, 11 ‘agree’) that they will now “talk about news more as a family”.

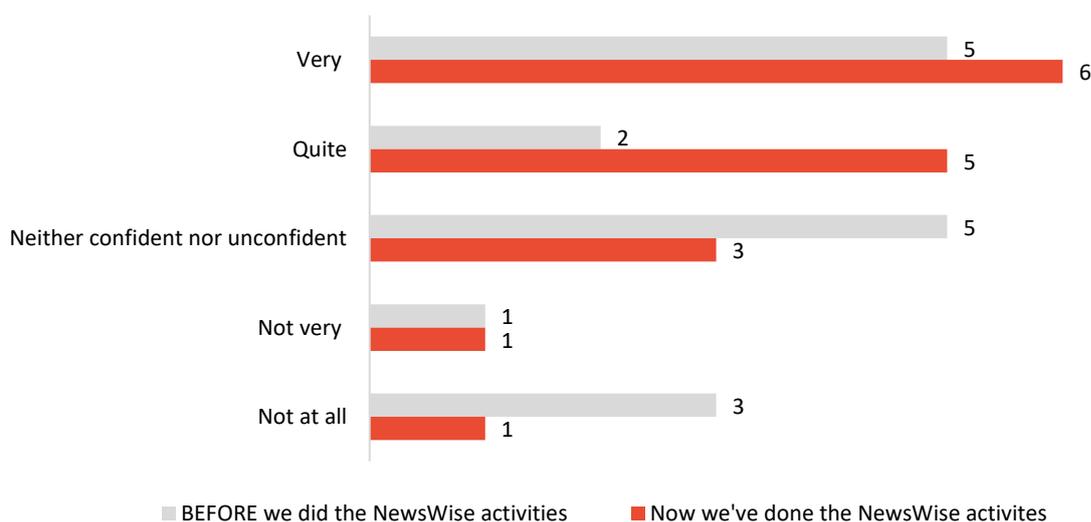
As part of adaptations to COVID-19, the NewsWise team developed a family pack of downloadable resources. This was designed to help parents support children’s news literacy at a crucial time, and included a very short, optional survey accessed through a QR code to capture any feedback. These family resources were downloaded 2,241 times, and 18 survey responses were received. 5 rated the activities ‘Very good’, 5 ‘good’ and 8 ‘OK’. Positive comments included:



“They are very thought provoking.”

Compared with the workshop, there were less pronounced changes in confidence in supporting children’s news literacy, with the biggest increase in the ‘quite’ confident category (see **Figure 26**). This may indicate that the ‘face-to-face’ element is more important when supporting families rather than teaching staff.

**Figure 26: How confident do you feel about helping your child to understand the news?**



In addition, and also in response to the COVID-19 school closures, the NewsWise team developed a parent-facing webinar to support family news literacy remotely, reaching 18 parents. To date, just three parents have provided feedback, 2 rating it ‘excellent’ and 1 ‘good’. All agreed that they would recommend the NewsWise webinar to others (2 ‘strongly agree’, 1 ‘agree’).

## Conclusion

The world has faced unprecedented challenges in the last year, and while UK schools prepare and plan to return as fully as possible in the new academic year, it is likely to be some time before teachers, children and families feel any sense of normality. Over recent months, it has become increasingly important to support good news literacy skills to help news consumers determine the reliability of news sources and distinguish misinformation. Data from the second year of the NewsWise programme suggest that teachers, children and families who have participated in the project this year have increased both their active and critical engagement with news.

Teachers in particular have increased their understanding of news literacy and their confidence in teaching news literacy in the classroom, while children have developed more positive news literacy attitudes, behaviours and skills to help them identify trustworthy news, such as checking more than one trusted source. It is particularly heartening to see that the number of pupils interested in news more than doubled following participation in the NewsWise workshop, and to note some of the signs of longer-term impact, such as the developed “news fluency, maturity and world view” noted in teacher interviews carried out several months after taking part in NewsWise.

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. Alongside the roll-out of the virtual NewsWise workshops in September, the team plan to continue to visit schools as soon as it is safe to do so, allowing them to reach even more children in areas of disadvantage with this vital programme.

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